



Changing the World through Consumption
The Contradictions of Political Engagement in the Case of Oatly
McCrow-Young, Ally

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Media and Communication Studies, Lund University

TINA ASKANIUS (ED.) WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ALFONSO MÉNDEZ
FORSSELL, LISA JALAKAS, ALLY MCCROW-YOUNG AND JAVIE SSOZI



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Table of Contents

Introduction	7
The Ambivalence of Femvertising: Exploring the meeting between feminism and advertising through the audience lens	13
<i>Lisa Jalakas</i>	
Presidents on Twitter: Twitter discourses of African presidents and implications for democracy	81
<i>Javie Ssozi</i>	
Changing the World through Consumption: The contradictions of political engagement in the case of Oatly.....	153
<i>Ally McCrow-Young</i>	
Media Literacy in Mexico: Towards a critical pluralist approach	225
<i>Alfonso Méndez Forssell</i>	
Author biographies	305

Introduction

In June 2016, the first community of students graduated from the MSc in Media and Communication Studies at Lund University, Sweden. This book showcases a selection of excellent postgraduate dissertations.

The focus of the international Master's programme in Media and Communication at Lund University is to question and understand global media structures and processes in modern life. Students are trained to consider media's all-encompassing role in contemporary politics, society and culture. We consider media to be a starting point to understand global events, such as news reporting on environmentalism and natural disasters, political culture and social movement mobilisations, or imagination and storytelling in popular culture. Studying media can also be a starting point to understanding the routine, everyday nature of social interaction with screen culture and mobile media, in public and private spheres, in local, national and global settings.

Over the course of the two year programme, students are taught to combine empirical evidence and critical theory from the social sciences and humanities, and to ask critical questions of media past and present. Most importantly, media are never treated in isolation but always examined as situated, contingent and as part of the multidimensional and complex aspects of modern societies.

The master's thesis provides a unique opportunity to make a creative and original contribution to knowledge. Students on our programme write theses that are based on specific contexts and case studies where they use empirical and theoretical analysis to further knowledge of media structures and processes in modern life.

This edited collection features contributions from four of our MSc alumni; Alfonso Forssell, Lisa Jalakas, Ally McCrow-Young and Javie Ssozi. Their work provides excellent examples of original and creative theses on fascinating topics in the area of media and communication studies. The empirical areas covered range from media literacy in Mexico and the role of Twitter in political communication

across different East African countries, to consumer activism and animal rights, and audience perspectives on feminist advertising.

In the first chapter, **Lisa Jalakas** delves into critical questions around the phenomenon of femvertising, a growing marketing trend spearheaded by large brands such as Dove, Always and Barbie, who use feminist values and discourses of female empowerment to encourage brand activism. Through an audience study drawing on in-depth interviews with young Swedish females, Jalakas finds that their experience of feminist advertising challenge the black and white accounts saturating current debates around contemporary feminisms. While the incorporation of feminism into popular and commercial culture is often dismissed as manipulative, hollow and politically impotent, the results of her study suggest that audience reactions towards this phenomenon are not easily generalised. Rather, women extract different meanings from the advertisements, appropriating them to fit into their own individual context. They engage critically, and judge the advertisements' value based on previous knowledge of both brand, product, and advertising in general.

Among their reactions, she identifies a distinct ambivalence. On the one hand, the advertisements are seen as feminist resources to be shared and debated online in social networks. They deeply move women and spark hope that feminism packaged and commodified in such a way may carry the potential of opening the eyes of non-feminists. On the other hand, respondents also express scepticism towards the commercial purpose at the heart of this strategy, and towards advertising in general. Jalakas concludes by suggesting that it is within this ambivalence that a phenomenon such as femvertising and consumers' complex responses to it is best understood.

Subsequently, **Javie Ssozi's** chapter provides unique insights into how and why African politicians use Twitter. In a critical analysis of the presidents' Twitter practices in Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya, Ssozi provides a sobering account of the role of digital media technologies in democratic processes. He argues that despite the 'newness' and participatory potentials of Twitter, we should remain sceptical of claims that such social media trends are democratic per se. Even though the growing number of presidents on Twitter presents an opportunity for ordinary citizens to engage in political debate with politicians, it is the initiatives citizens take to engage the president that forge democratic participation. An in-depth analysis of the Twitter practices of the three presidents demonstrate how they do raise a wide range of political and personal topics in ways that encourage public engagement in different ways. Yet, the Twitter practices of the presidents generally show a very low intensity of engagement and participation in public debate.

Indeed, where dialogue with the presidents seems to be taking place, it is either short-lived or entangled in power struggles.

One of the key findings of this study concerns how references to popular culture, sports or other personal interests work as a way of connecting with citizens through Twitter, and as a possible catalyst for engaging in issues of a more political character. Such tactics however remain a double-edged sword which in some cases may play into the hands of the president to influence and control public discourse, while in others work to boost participation in a vibrant political debate.

Importantly, the results of Ssozi's study need to be understood within the broader context of the current political climate across the three countries, marked by a growing concern over prosecution of bloggers, online surveillance and social media bans. This not only affirms that Twitter remains an alternative political sphere, it also shows that deliberation through platforms like Twitter can easily be distorted. With his research, Ssozi thus urges us to remain attentive to and critical of the social, political and historical perspectives that shape the use of media in contemporary politics.

In chapter three, **Ally McCrow-Young** explores the dynamics at play in consumer activism through the case of the so-called 'milk wars' of 2014, between the Swedish dairy lobby and Swedish oat milk producer Oatly. Through in-depth interviews with both Oatly consumers and employees, McCrow-Young explores the different modes of political engagement that are located and allowed for within a corporate environment. Much like Jalakas' examination of the tensions and contradictions involved in feminist advertising, this study raises questions of the possibilities and limitations involved in commodity activism, as a way of doing politics within brand culture, and of turning individual consumption into political and social change. McCrow-Young's study addresses the multiple spaces where political engagement occurs, to analyse the complexity of online and offline commodity activism.

The findings show that the relationship between Oatly and their consumers is characterised by a push-and-pull tension between corporate interests and individual action. Consumer activity negotiates top-down power from Oatly through a creative and diverse fusion of online and offline engagement, connecting micro individual participation to the macro political community. The analysis shows that brand activism and consumer labour is best understood – not through a binary conception of exploiter versus exploited – but rather as a duality of political engagement, where individual participation and emotion operate

simultaneously as brand work for Oatly *and* as a way to enhance personal engagement with the vegan, animal rights and environmental causes.

Finally, in chapter four, **Alfonso Méndez Forssell** sets out to understand and critically scrutinise the media system in Mexico to explore how media literacy can forge civic participation and the democratisation of media. Drawing on qualitative interviews with expert media professionals and observers, as well as a media policy analysis, his research sheds light on how the historical relationship between political and media elites in the country has been a determinant factor in the process of increasing media concentration, and the formation of a media system driven by neoliberal policies. This media system, characterised by concentration of media ownership and privatization, has framed people as consumers, while diluting their roles as citizens, and reducing their engagement to a form of 'spectral participation' in media policymaking. His study raises important questions of how media literacy can provide alternative strategies to critique and change the market ideology of the Mexican media, and political landscape; and how media literate publics might contribute to democratic affairs that involve the media, thus encouraging greater civic participation.

Based on this extensive analysis, Forssell proposes a normative model of media literacy underpinned by agonistic democratic principles sensitive to the needs and struggles in Mexico. Promoting an alternative understanding of democracy, founded on contestation rather than consent, he argues that if the media are meant to seek and represent the plurality of citizens' experiences and points of view, it follows that democratic politics should create the conditions for the encounter to find its expression in dialectic terms, and channel the irreconcilable character of plural democratic debates in a positive way.

All four texts published in this edited volume were originally presented and evaluated as part of the final thesis exams in May 2016, in which they were awarded top grades. During the autumn of 2016 they have been revised and edited for publication in the publication series *Förtjänstfulla examensarbeten i medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap (FEA)*, which was launched in 2008 to bring attention to and reward student work of a particularly high quality. The four theses have been chosen for publication as they, through the skilful combination of empirical evidence and theoretical analysis, demonstrate why and how the study of media and culture matters in understanding knowledge, power and subjectivity in our experience of public life and the world today. A number of common qualities and virtues make these four theses stand out:

First of all, at the heart of the work of all four authors is a strong data analysis based on solid theoretical foundations. The analyses are the results of robust theoretical and empirical groundwork but also of analytical creativity and intellectual independence. They excel in how they have mined empirical data sets to convincingly use quotes from interviews and other forms of material to illustrate analytical points and relate to the literature. Common to their work is thus the persuasive presentation of findings and arguments structured around key analytical themes identified in the material. Importantly, empirical observations around the particular countries and contexts studied, be it Uganda, Sweden or Mexico, are put in dialogue with broader questions of the mediation of culture, power and politics. In this respect, they show how even small-scale research projects successfully provide unique contributions to knowledge by detailing and firmly contextualizing distinct case studies while at the same time connecting the specificities of these issues to critical perspectives on meta processes such as individualization, neoliberalism, commercialization and globalization.

Further, engaging with the four texts of this volume will leave the reader with a sense of the hybridity, complexity and ambiguity involved in research processes and results when seeking to critically understand media in contemporary societies. The authors share a refusal to shift into a dogmatic position vis-à-vis the topics and problems addressed. Instead, they focus on the contradictions and subtleties in the empirical material and take a nuanced position towards challenging and often politically sensitive topics. In other words, they offer no easy answers or solutions to the problems studied. In this manner, all four authors use and make relevant critical theory but they also show how the media practices of consumers, citizens, media practitioners and politicians sometimes complicate and challenge the dogmas of critical theory.

Finally, a high level of self-reflection as to the role of the researcher and the research process itself is a common thread running through the four chapters. Demonstrating transparency and reflexivity, the authors skillfully detail the crafting of research designs and the various stages and potential problems involved in the research process and how to best address them. We see this in how they argue convincingly for the choice of research methods and critically engage with the ontologies and epistemologies underlying the chosen method or the combination of different methods. These sensitivities are equally demonstrated in how the authors bring detailed attention to issues of sampling, coding or interviewing and the research ethics involved in the various steps of the process of collecting and analyzing empirical data.

The publication *Excellent MSc Dissertations 2016: Media and Communication Studies, Lund University* is the first of a series of publications that showcase excellent student work on master's level to a wide audience. We hope that the book will guide and inspire present and future students in and beyond our programme in the process of writing their master's thesis. We also hope that the work of the authors in this edited collection generates debate about the topics under investigation and their original contribution to knowledge in media and communication studies.

Tina Askanius

Lund, December 2016

The Ambivalence of Femvertising

Exploring the meeting between feminism and advertising through the audience lens

Lisa Jalakas

Introduction

Feminism and advertising might seem like an incompatible combination. Limited by time and space, advertising relies on gender stereotypes that are easy to convey to create quick identification and has therefore been a central focus in advertising literature since the 1950s (Eisend, Plagemann and Sollwedel, 2014), the target of much feminist activism (Gill, 2007b: 74) and crowned as ‘one of society’s most disturbing cultural products’ (Zoonen, 1994:67).

In Sweden, the Swedish Women’s Lobby runs the project Reklamera in collaboration with the media critical network Allt är möjligt (everything is possible) to lobby for legislation against sexist advertising, an initiative that recently spread to neighbouring countries Denmark and Norway (Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 2016). In a survey they commissioned in 2013, nine out of ten women responded that advertising makes them feel bad about their own bodies and makes them want to change something about themselves. This was three times higher than among men, which is in line with other research in the area and probably reflects the fact that women in advertising are more often shown as passive, denuded, weak, sexualised and objectified (Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 2013). This, the lobby argues, is an obstacle to gender equality.

Against that backdrop, one might be encouraged by the growing trend of feminist advertising, also known as femvertising. In so-called femvertisements products are sold with the help of empowering messages aimed at girls and women. Females

are portrayed as active, adventurous and capable, urged to believe in themselves and encouraged to realise their natural beauty and potential (Skey, 2015). According to SheKnows Media, this strategy rests on the idea that advertising can empower women, while also selling products (Wallace, 2015).

Personal care brand Dove was a forerunner for this strategy, launching their successful Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004. The brand was credited for being bold and ground-breaking (Neff, 2014) for using models in different sizes and with different skin colours (albeit all still photo-shopped) to illustrate that all women are beautiful; it is just a matter of realising it (Dove, 2016).

It took a few years, but many brands have followed in Dove's footsteps, using gender equality, female empowerment and feminism to sell. In 2015, gender equality was one of the top social causes backed by brands (Ames, 2015) and the first Femvertising Awards was held in the US, rewarding those brands who had managed to inspire, humour, create social impact and speak to the next generation with the help of feminist values (Monllos, 2015).

If sexist advertising is an obstacle to gender equality, can feminist advertising pave the way for it? Is this trend what feminists have been waiting for, or is it a simple scam to lure a powerful consumer group into consumption while avoiding feminist critique?

Opinions are divided among bloggers, journalists and scholars, but there is a tendency in the literature to rule this out as a bastardised and ruined feminism, deflated and lacking political force. Cultural theorist and feminist Angela McRobbie, for example, posits that when feminism is used in this way it contributes to disarming the feminist movement and preventing further feminist advances, a concept she calls 'feminism undone' (2009).

Audiences, however, are rarely asked. On the handful of occasions that the audience perspective has come forward (Duffy, 2010; Taylor, Johnston and Whitehead, 2016; Millard, 2009; Stokvold and Andersson, 2013) it becomes clear that the complexities this strategy carries does not allow for a simple ruling. Instead, it seems these advertisements spark both feelings of scepticism and joy.

It is within this ambivalence that this thesis explores the phenomenon of femvertising. Young Swedish women, who have an interest in feminism and gender equality, have been interviewed about their understanding of these advertisements, and how they see this trend fitting into the feminist movement. To overlook the women that act and react to these types of social stimuli is to

ignore a key dimension of why and how a movement lives and develops, and this is a crack, which this thesis seeks to address.

An important aspect of these campaigns is that they live on social media (Gill and Elias, 2014), where they are shared and circulated, further adding to the marketing buzz. They neatly fit into contemporary network society, and in particular the category of brand activism, where consumers are invited to champion values and principles together with a brand (Mukjerjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012). Here, the gap in the research widens. While reactions towards these feminist campaigns have been touched upon by some scholars, the *actions* they generate are underexplored. We do know however, that these advertisements have yielded millions of actions online. For example, Always' video 'Like a girl', aimed to address girls' lack of self-esteem, has been viewed over 61 million times and commented over 42 000 times on YouTube alone (Always, 2014), and Dove's 'Real Beauty Sketches', saluting women's natural beauty, was the most shared video advertisement in 2013 (Siddiqi, 2013). While it is beyond doubt that these campaigns are successful online, we lack the knowledge and understanding of what hides behind those numbers.

Therefore, this thesis will explore femvertising from an audience perspective and explore which reactions *and* actions these campaigns generate, and how these can be contextualised. Instead of ruling this out as a faux feminism, this thesis will illuminate how these campaigns fit into contemporary feminism, how young women make sense of them and how they might find use for them on social media. In a larger context, the results provide insight on online feminist engagement in Sweden, and what this trend might mean for young feminists and for feminism as a movement.

Sweden makes for a pertinent case and context in which to explore this phenomenon. It is praised as one of the most gender equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum, 2015) and the current government calls itself 'the first feminist government in the world' (Regeringskansliet, 2016). Yet, many would agree equality has not been fully obtained. In 2005, the political party Feminist Initiative was founded, with a proclaimed aim to address the lack of feminist politics in Sweden (Feministiskt Initiativ), a clear indication that many still see work ahead. In December 2015, the short book 'We should all be feminists'¹ was distributed to Swedish high school students, with the hope of instigating a

¹ "Alla borde vara feminister" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies was published in 2015 and is based on the TED talk about her views on feminism that she held in 2013, which became a global hit online and was sampled by pop star Beyoncé in the song "Flawless" (Flood, 2015).

‘feminist awakening’ among young people and function as a stepping stone to a more inclusive conversation about gender (Flood, 2015). Sweden is in what Amanda Lotz refers to as the ‘intermezzo’, both before and after, in a time *after* many feminist advances but *before* having reached complete gender equality (2007:72). This makes the Swedish feminist conversation particularly interesting to dive into.

In this thesis, feminist advertising will be put under the microscope and in doing so multiple areas of research will intersect. Advertising, brand activism, political engagement and online participation will be drawn upon, with a strand of postfeminism spanning over them all and with a constant focus on the audience.

It will become clear that when researching femvertising from an audience perspective, complexities appear. Paradoxical content makes for paradoxical receptions. By exploring rather than condemning these often contradictory campaigns I hope to bring you on a fascinating journey exploring the meeting between feminism and advertising.

Because whether the two are incompatible or not; they have been merged.

Research questions

This project answers the following research questions:

1. How can we understand the reactions and actions generated by these advertising campaigns?
2. How can we better understand the relationship between feminism and advertising through the eyes of the individual feminist?
3. How much value can we place on the idea that femvertising is undoing feminism?
4. What can this marketing trend, and the reactions it generates, tell us about contemporary feminism?

Diving into the debate about the commercial use of feminism

In order to get a better understanding of how this topic has been approached, this chapter provides an overview of the literature on contemporary feminist advertising. It mainly draws on the notions of post- and popular feminism, commodification, empowerment and online engagement. The chapter takes its point of departure in 1992 when a body of texts was published which turned out to shape much of the discussions surrounding feminist advertisements for the following decades. The chapter then moves closer to mapping out what we know thus far about audience reactions to femvertising today.

1992 was the year when Robert Goldman published his book 'Reading ads socially'. In this book he argues that feminism has been adopted by the advertising industry, turning it into 'commodity feminism'. As a response to mounting feminist critique during the 1980s, advertisers had to rethink their engagement with female consumers, and thus re-adapted their portrayal of women and incorporated feminist values into advertisements. The 'new woman' featured in many ads was empowered, equal and independent and thus carried many of the feminist visions so many fought for (Goldman, 1992).

However, by incorporating 'the cultural power of feminism' advertisers emptied feminism of its political value and transformed it into just another commodity on the market. Using feminism for marketing purposes turns feminism from politics to a mere style, according to Goldman. Feminism becomes a sign value that can be bought together with a product. When products can simulate female independence and equal rights, the social goals of feminism are turned into lifestyles for individuals (Goldman, 1992:130-133). Goldman's notion of commodity feminism is an often used theoretical lens in texts examining advertisements with a feminist message.

Most writers urge a scepticism towards the phenomenon of mainstreaming feminism (Fagerström and Nilsson, 2008; Marcus Reker, 2016; McRobbie, 2009; Lazar, 2014) claiming, as Goldman, that this is a faux feminism packaged to fit the market (Baxter, 2015, Lazar, 2006) and that it is not the female consumers who will gain in the end but the corporations using it (Murray, 2012). Others suggest it would benefit women if there were more advertisements of this kind (Sirr, 2015), that it could spark and change online conversations in a positive way (Condon, 2015), function as a meaningful introduction to feminism (Hains,

2014) and that feminists should not turn their cheek to commercialisation as a useful avenue to advance the feminist cause (Scott, 2000). Somewhere in between we find writers like Sarah Banet-Weiser, who recognises the ambivalent nature of the strategy but argues it is too easy to dismiss as a capitalist hoax (2004; 2012a; 2012b).

In the vein of commodity feminism, a more elaborate marketing strategy has emerged. This strategy, known as brand or commodity activism, invites consumers to champion feminist values in collaboration with a corporation. By using hashtags, sharing content and even producing own content, consumers can act politically while strengthening a brand. This invitation adds an interesting dimension to femvertising, and will be explored in this thesis.

While the incorporation of feminism into advertising has been explored by many scholars, the audience is rarely heard. This means we know little about how women themselves make sense of this type of feminism and whether they consider it watered down, faux and dangerous for the feminist cause, or inspiring, necessary and even a meaningful compromise.

On the few occasions that the audience perspective has been explored (Duffy, 2010; Taylor, Johnston and Whitehead, 2016; Millard, 2009; Stokvold and Andersson, 2013), it has become clear that it is difficult, if not to say impossible, to label commodified feminism as simply good or bad. Reality seems to be much more multifaceted, and less predictable, than critiques of the phenomenon will have us think.

Navigating through the postfeminist universe

In order to make better sense of the research in this area, this literature review starts with a brief theoretical untangling.

Media commentator and feminist Rosalind Gill has often called attention to the shift in the portrayal of women in advertisements, situating this trend in a postfeminist discourse. According to Gill, we live in a 'postfeminist media culture'. She claims that the notion of postfeminism is the most important, as well as the most contested, in the feminist lexicon, and a crucial ingredient in feminist cultural analysis (2007a). Postfeminism is certainly no easy knot to untangle, and it is not the intention to do so in this thesis. Trying to offer a coherent definition to go by could only be considered a naive attempt at simplifying a movement and body of theories that is both complicated and contested.

However, a range of feminist voices negotiating the definition of postfeminism will be presented. This is important, as postfeminism is a common prism through which female empowerment in advertising is viewed (Banet-Weiser, 2012a; Banet-Weiser, 2012b; Crymble, 2012; Gill, 2007a; Gill, 2008, Lazar, 2006; Lazar, 2014; McRobbie, 2009). These voices and perspectives will both illuminate the intricacies of contemporary feminism, as well as illustrate that every voice adds an enriching nuance to the discussion. This should underpin the argument that audiences need to be heard in order to make better sense of the feminism we see weaved into many advertisements today.

In the past two decades postfeminism has been understood as a historical shift after the height of the second wave of feminism², a backlash against feminism, a new epistemological perspective within feminism and a sensibility made up of themes like individualism, choice, empowerment and consumerism (Gill, 2007a).

Postfeminism is a widely contested term. Shelley Budgeon (2001) offers a helpful distinction between the two main ways in which postfeminism has been understood. Either, it can be understood and defined as a backlash against second wave feminism, even as anti-feminism. It is anti-feminist in the sense that it rests on a false notion that equality between men and women has already been achieved. Thus, when women encounter problems trying to reach their goals in life, these are constructed as problems on an individual level, and not political and common ones (Budgeon, 2001: 13). Carisa Showden, for example, posits that postfeminism is guilty of depoliticising many of the political goals during the second wave by focusing on personal choices – and not on political action (2009:172). Germaine Greer has expressed this point all the more bluntly: ‘The future is female, we are told. Feminism has served its purpose and should eff off’ (quoted in Lazar, 2009:372). Postfeminism, understood in this way, is more about exploring different lifestyle options and pleasures, often through consumption, than engaging in social activism (Braithwaite, 2002).

2 While the first wave of feminism in the beginning of last century focused on legal rights for women, most notably the right to vote, the second wave, peaking in the 60s and 70s, expanded the movement to focus on every area of women's experiences, such as family life, sexuality and work. This has been followed by the third wave, when a younger generation brought attention to the differences *between* women, and the fourth wave, centering around feminist advances online and on social media (Munro, 2013). However, many feminist writers are reluctant to speak of the feminist movement in terms of waves as it undermines the advances made in between grander events and does not serve as a particularly useful metaphor.

The second approach to postfeminism is to see it as yet another stage for feminism, a movement and body of theory constantly in flux. This is a more productive perspective, according to Budgeon, and the one that will be adopted in this thesis. In this way of seeing it, the *post* in postfeminism does not signify the end to feminism, but implies that it is in a process of transformation. It should not be read as 'death', but rather as 'after'. Adopting this view means engaging with the limitations of more hegemonic forms of feminism, and to seek an understanding of how feminism is changing and evolving. It is not, as Showden posits above, a depoliticisation of feminism, but instead a political shift in its theoretical framework (Budgeon, 2001).

Thus, postfeminism can be described as the socio-political climate of contemporary feminist thought and action following the advances made during the second wave. Postfeminism can be understood as a term which encompasses all feminisms, which invites one to explore the contradictions and opportunities that women face (Robinson, 2008:39-40), and to challenge earlier feminist frameworks (Budgeon, 2001:14).

What some choose to call third wave feminism can be situated within this larger postfeminist frame. Third wave feminists depart from the notion that there are as many different versions of feminism as there are women, and that analyses must start from individuals' often varying experiences (Budgeon, 2011:282). Women must be allowed to identify their own feminism, in a way that makes sense to them. It is more about the emotional and personal than about public policy and marching in the streets (ibid: 283). However, third-wavers argue that their feminism is not merely individual, but also collective and political. They claim that a focus on the individual lifestyle and on the pleasures of contemporary cultural practices is not simply fun and self-indulgent. Rather, they recognise the tensions in this and attempt to explore the contradictions within these practices (Braithwaite, 2002). Feeling empowered by an advertisement aimed at selling body lotion can certainly be labeled a postfeminist contradiction, and one that deserves exploration.

Furthermore, third wave feminists welcome commercial media visibility and embrace the power that comes with that. Consumer culture is regarded as a place for female empowerment and not solely a platform for misogynistic expressions (Banet-Weiser, 2004:122). Thus, cultural production is a key sites of both analysis and activity for third wave feminism (Gillis et al., 2007).

The aim here is not to present a clear cut distinction between second, third and even fourth wave feminism (see Cochrane 2013 for an interesting journey through

this latest tide) and what others call postfeminism. Instead, contemporary feminism will be situated within a larger postfeminist frame, as suggested by Penelope Robinson (2008). In this thesis, this is viewed as a feminism in the Western world, where women in many ways enjoy the same legal rights as men, but where inequality still resides. It is a context in which gender roles are continuously challenged and negotiated, but still left largely unchanged.

Regardless of what we call it, this latter approach to postfeminism offers a more productive entry point as it allows exploration, and not condemnation, of the exciting and often disturbing contradictions that women face today.

Popularising feminism: a doing or an undoing of feminism?

The theorists who align themselves with the second perspective of postfeminism have been interested in exploring how postfeminism has been involved in popularising feminist ideas through mainstream media, often called 'popular feminism'. There is widespread disagreement about whether feminism will gain or be disadvantaged when popularised. The impact that the popular has on feminism is a major concern for feminist critics (Hollows and Moseley, 2006:2), and as Gillis et al posit: 'for feminism to be popular means engaging with some pretty thorny ambiguities (2007:xviii). Many have viewed the development of popularising feminism as positive, as media images help empower women in front of larger audiences. However, the more common view is more sceptical, seeing it as neutralising and co-opting feminism while leaving the traditional portrayal of femininity intact (Lazar, 2009).

Whether one wants to call it recuperation, incorporation or hijacking of feminism into mainstream media, it is a trend that can be seen in music, magazines, films, television and advertising. Here, the focus will lie primarily on what we know about feminism in advertising, but examples will be borrowed from other genres as well.

Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie has gone from celebrating the emergence of popular feminism to condemning it. In the 1990s, she saw opportunities for further feminist success and predicted that if popular mass media started to address feminism and women's issues it could lead to a positive development for the movement itself (2009:13-14). However, as she noticed, it was a different kind of feminism that was taken into account and it led to a displacement of feminism as a political movement (ibid: 15). McRobbie accuses herself of failing to recognise

the need for popular culture to constantly reinvent itself, meaning that feminism would only last as long as a fashion season (ibid:5).

She has since developed the concept of feminism undone (2009). According to McRobbie, the postfeminist era we live in should be defined not only as a backlash against and an undermining of the gains made during the second wave, but also a much more viciously calculated turn of events. By taking feminism into account a range of institutions, including the media, have created a faux feminism to thwart feminist critique and prevent a new women's movement from rising. This means that feminism has become undone. McRobbie directs harsh criticism towards the recuperation of feminism into mainstream media (2009), in a way that she herself admits sounds almost like a conspiracy theory (ibid:1).

According to Rosalind Gill, it is the mixing of feminist and anti-feminist ideas that makes contemporary media culture postfeminist (2007a). McRobbie has described this as double entanglement, arguing that young women are offered versions of feminist goals such as freedom, empowerment and choice as a substitute for real feminist politics and transformation (McRobbie, 2009). This entanglement can be seen in the shift in portrayals of women and women's sexuality in advertising, which is crucial in understanding postfeminism, according to Gill. Women have gone from being portrayed as passive, dumb sex *objects* to active, desiring sexual *subjects*. They are no longer judged by men, but instead it is about feeling good and attractive for yourself. This construction is full of contradictions, according to Gill. On the one hand girls and women are told they can do anything, but on the other hand their bodies are still subject to scrutiny and surveillance (2007a). This double entanglement is anti-feminist, yet feminist, seemingly progressive but also regressive (Lazar, 2009).

In fact, Gill argues, advertisers not only use, but revise, empty and even attack feminism just to sell more products. Feminist goals like independence and choice are being 'sold back to us as choices about what to consume' (2007b: 95). In this advertising landscape, feminism is just another style to choose from. It is an offer to young women to take control of their lives through consumption, instead of through collective struggle for real political change. This is not, Gill affirms, a case of advertising gone feminist (2007b:94-95). That feminism in advertising cannot contribute to any real changes in society, or empower women in a significant way, is echoed by many others (see for example Crymble, 2012; Lazar, 2006; 2009 and Murray, 2012).

Sarah Banet-Weiser is less pessimistic with regards to commercialised feminism when analysing the girl power produced by cable network Nickelodeon. She

considers this a representation of feminism, albeit full of tensions and contradictions, and argues that to call this mode of feminist discourse anti-feminist is untrue. It still represents a version of feminist ideology, even if it is suited to fit the limits of commercial media (2004).

In contrast to this, Gill and McRobbie both argue that the feminism in advertising and media is not real as it lacks the potential to create real change. In fact, “real” and its synonyms are used all too often. It is a problematic term to use (much like meaningful and useful) as it means little unless used in a personal context. Realness is a subjective perception, and the use of this word implies that the writer using it possesses the rare skill of defining what real is.

According to media professor Catharine Lumby, it is problematic that both Gill and McRobbie rest their arguments on generalisations of both young women and media content. She calls for a recognition of the diversity of both media production and consumption, and a stronger attention to context. Without this, it is too easy to use popular culture and its consumers as evidence of a feminist position, when in fact reality is not that one-dimensional or simple to grasp (2011).

This firm categorisation of “real” or “less real” feminism, and Gill and McRobbie's dismissals of popularised feminism, can indeed be argued to rest on generalisations. In this respect, Banet-Weiser's argument is more compelling, as she recognises that feminism comes in many shapes and variations and does not consider her own feminism the only measurement stick to go by.

Still, the notions of feminism undone and double entanglement have value, as it sheds light on a framework's impact on the content. A feminism used with the purpose of selling will always be adjusted to exactly that: selling. It will come with limitations and alterations and it is highly plausible that this results in a weakened and partly depoliticised version of the ideology, simply because the feminism in advertising does not have a political purpose - but a commercial one.

Commodified feminism as a resource

After highlighting some of the main arguments against this commercial use of feminism, this section seeks to illuminate a more positive approach to the phenomenon.

In the anthology ‘Marketing and feminism’ Linda Scott nuances the view on commodity feminism by challenging the idea that feminism and capitalism are

incompatible. She claims that the anti-market prejudice within feminist thought prevents positive developments within advertising (such as changing the portrayal of women), and that this attitude 'shuts off an avenue for the advancement of feminism already shown to be broadly effective' (Scott, 2000:17). An oppression of women sadly occurs within all economic systems, Scott continues, and complex gender phenomena should not merely be attributed to an economic ideology. 'Capitalism is not the cause: it is merely the current circumstance' (Scott, 2000:35).

The market can in fact be used in order to advance the feminist cause, according to Scott. Furthermore, ever since the first wave of feminism the movement *has* been part of the market and often benefited from it. It is therefore not only counter-productive but also hypocritical to claim there is or should be a binary division between feminism and capitalism. To claim that nothing truly feminist can be produced in a capitalist consumer culture is to strive backwards (2000).

Rebecca Hains adds an interesting dimension to the debate about commodified feminism and suggests that it can function as a productive introduction to basic feminist values. After interviewing young self-identified feminists who listen to both the British pop girl group the Spice Girls (often accused of hijacking the term 'girl power' for commercial purposes) and to the feminist underground punk band Riot grrrls, she suggests that the chronology of encounter, as well as social context, should be taken into account when analysing commodity feminist texts. Her study reveal that the women's consumption of Spice girls inspired them to fight back against inequalities in society and also sparked their later interest in feminism and the Riot grrrls (2014). This shows that there is value and merit in feminism existing in varying forms.

In line with this, Kathleen Karlyn testifies to how useful popular culture is when introducing feminism to young students. She argues that using music, films, TV and magazines to discuss feminism is a way of 'putting gender on the table' and facilitating a political view on gender among students (2006:65). Zooming out slightly to a broader view on political engagement, these findings go hand in hand with Liesbet van Zoonen's claim that popular culture can lower the threshold to political engagement (Van Zoonen, 2005), also explored by Peter Dahlgren (2013) and Joke Hermes (2005) who speaks of 'cultural citizenship'. Hermes even argues that popular culture, more than any other form of culture, allow us to bond and build communities since the stories provided are of actual use to us (2005:155). Especially disempowered citizens, like the young and the feminine, can benefit from the popular as it offers possibilities to build collectives across borders, in which shared hopes and dreams can be produced (ibid:141).

In earlier work however, Rebecca Hains has argued that once female empowerment is used to sell something (anything and everything) it is emptied and rendered meaningless, useless and without a chance to effect or inspire change (2009). This change in Hains' perception shows that her earlier reasoning, although insightful, was flawed. After questioning young women on their meeting with commodified girl power, and how it influenced them, she changed her views.

This suggests that commodified and commercialised feminism cannot simply be ruled off as capitalist ploys, but demand more careful exploration. It also suggests that getting in touch with women directly can alter theoretical positions. Is it possible that there is a significant disconnect between how scholars and everyday women contextualise these advertisements?

Perhaps even media content produced within a 'dirty' framework like advertising, a core of capitalism, can be utilised as a feminist tool and as a stepping stone to more substantial feminisms. This possibility should not be overlooked, but rather explored.

'I'm actually crying because this is such a great video'³

The stance taken in this thesis is that commodified feminism needs to be researched from an audience perspective before ruling it out as meaningless and faux, of which I have myself been guilty of doing in the past (Jalakas, 2014b; 2015a and 2015b). Nonetheless, we cannot ignore that at the heart of advertising is the imperative of making consumers buy. That statement is neither controversial nor contested. If feminism did not sell, it would hardly be used as a marketing strategy. Hence, while we may argue that feminism in media and advertising has benefits, we must also recognise that it is a trend with a monetary purpose.

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency towards companies promoting social causes to increase revenue. It seems that in the vein of commodity feminism, feminist activism too has been appropriated by corporations. In fact, according to the American Marketing Association, gender equality was one of the main social causes backed by brands in 2015 (Ames, 2015). This takes its shape in advertising campaigns like Always #LikeAGirl campaign, Barbie's #YouCanBeAnything or Pantene's #ShineStrong. Many of these campaigns encapsulate much more than

3 The quote is a comment to Always' video #LikeAGirl on Youtube, posted 17th of February 2016 (Always, 2014).

merely advertisement videos, but also teaching, seminars, TED talks (Always, 2016), workshops, research (Dove, 2016), advisory councils and Instagram albums (Barbie, 2016). They are multifaceted, global and present on multiple sites and platforms. Here, consumers are invited to champion women and girls' self-esteem and believe in themselves with the brand. Focus lies less on the products for sale and more on the feminist message the brand claims to support, possibly reflecting the public's discomfort with seeing the two side by side in equal measure.

A pervasive theme in these campaigns is the use of the word 'empowerment', a cornerstone in the postfeminist vocabulary (McRobbie, 2009). According to Gill, women of today live in a constant state of empowerment. Even the most meaningless and trivial actions, like buying a pair of shoes or eating a particular brand of cereal, is seen as a gesture of female empowerment (2008). Indeed, many of these campaigns are focused on feeling good about yourself and your body. The discourse in which these videos are situated is what Gill and Elias call the 'Love Your Body-discourse'. These are affirmative, carrying what seems to be feminist messages and are targeted at girls and women to help them realise their beauty and encourage them to redefine beauty norms. A theme that runs through these campaigns is the message that what women lack and need is better self-esteem (2014). Sarah Banet-Weiser too concludes that self-esteem is remarkably brandable in this century and has become a postfeminist product attainable through consumption. To borrow her words: 'girls' self-esteem is hot' (2012a: 18).

This marketing strategy is one step further than merely harnessing the cultural power of feminism. It is an invitation to those consumers who are critical of unrealistic body ideals to contribute to changing the narrative along with the corporation (Banet-Weiser, 2012a:49). This lucrative trend is referred to as brand or commodity activism and has emerged in the current meeting between neoliberalism and digital media, where boundaries between cultural, political and economic spheres are blurred. Activism is no longer what it used to be, some scholars argue, as it has been incorporated and reshaped by the power of capitalism. Now, to consume is also to act politically, which adds a strong emotional dimension to consumption (Sturken, 2012).

Indeed, we cannot shy away from the emotional impact these types of advertising campaigns intend to have on us, and often succeed in creating. In fact, even Gill and Elias admit to being moved to tears by many of these 'Love Your Body' videos (2014: 180). This begs the question whether this emotional dimension changes

our perception of these advertisements, and if it makes us more likely to support the brand behind it.

Dokyun et al. (2015) would suggest it does. Through a large-scale content study, coding 100 000 messages from 800 different companies on Facebook, they have detected a trend. A large part of companies' posts on Facebook contain emotional appeals and stories about the companies' philanthropic outreach. The study concludes that this in turn does in fact have a positive impact on engagement, as these posts are more likely to be liked, shared and commented (2015). Thus, warm and touching videos with a feel good-factor are more likely to create engagement online, than videos with pure informative content. The fact that many of the campaign videos mentioned above have been viewed millions of time supports this conclusion.

A cynic would say that advertisers intentionally play with our emotions, by using values close to us, merely to get us to support their brand and buy their products. While that might be true, we cannot rule out the possibility that women might feel they gain something positive from being exposed to these messages and that they see value in this version of feminism, nor can we dismiss that women can shift between these two perspectives, seeing it as both good and bad.

#SpeakBeautiful⁴: advertisements with a request to act

If these emotional advertisement videos are designed to make us act, it is important to look at what type of engagement is expected and how we can view that engagement, which will be done here.

As a result of us spending more time on social media platforms, corporations spend more time and money engineering content to create engagement with consumers (Dokyun et al., 2015). Recommendations from friends or family members on social media are important sources of information that we deem credible. Corporations capitalise on this by encouraging consumers to recommend the brand through so called 'word-of-mouth marketing' (Jenkins et al., 2013:76).

⁴ In Dove's video 'Speak beautiful' viewers are requested to help change the way we talk about beauty on social media (Dove US, 2015), in a way resembling what some authors see as an exploitation of online users by requesting them to perform free digital labour (see for example Terranova, 2004 and Fuchs and Seignani, 2013).

The campaigns explored here rely on consumer participation and consumer-generated content, made possible through digital developments and the rise of Web 2.0 platforms. A vital part of these campaigns is the strategic incorporation of consumers, who are invited to take part in, help shape and influence the campaign – and in doing so, building the brand. This demands further exploration of where this type of activism fits into contemporary culture, and the forms of citizenship enabled by these corporations (Banet-Weiser, 2012a). What type of feminism is enabled, if any, and where does advertising fit into the struggle for equality?

Using Always' #LikeAGirl campaign as an example of the brands' strategic use of social media, the audience is offered three choices on how to act after viewing the video on YouTube: 'Share – to inspire girls everywhere. Tweet – the amazing things you do #LikeAGirl. Stand up – for girls' confidence at Always.com' (Always, 2014). Many argue that this type of marketing is an exploitation of consumers, using them to push the brand forward and increase profit, relying and even assuming that they are there to spread the word for you. Others put more emphasis on the power given to consumers by inviting them in to play (Duffy, 2010).

These campaigns, promoting equality, feminism and empowerment, are often credited for going viral and listed on online viral charts, seen in headlines like 'Always' '#LikeAGirl' goes viral and claims the no. 2 spot on the viral chart' (Chung, 2014), and 'How Dove's 'Real Beauty Sketches' became the most viral video ad of all time' (Stamper, 2013).

However, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) argue that talking about media content as viral is to belittle the active decisions made by viewers, listeners, readers and consumers. Calling it viral assumes a passive audience, helplessly infected by a virus. It says little about how we assess content and how we come to the decision to share or not. To speak of content as viral distorts the understanding of the power relation between media producers and consumers, overestimating the power of the former (2013:20-21). By judging content, valuing it and deciding whether to pass it along or not we jointly decide whether content should spread or not, live or die. Media content is no longer merely distributed *to us*, but circulated *by us* through our social networks, and we all contribute to ongoing discussions and online phenomena by sharing, re-framing and modifying media texts (ibid:22-23).

Sarah Banet-Weiser, using Dove's campaign as an example, aligns herself with this latter camp and argues that since the campaign asks consumers to act (empowered

through choice) it cannot be dismissed as a mere manipulative attempt by advertisers. Yes, she argues, the labour that Dove asks for is a form of uncompensated labour and therefore exploitative. At the same time it is a product of emotions and affective desire and a form of creative activity (2012b:51). The labour requested, such as interacting, sharing and even producing content, should therefore not be seen as either exploitation or empowerment, but as a compromise between the two.

Brooke Duffy interviewed women who entered a competition by Dove which challenged “real women” to make an advertisement of their own. Her findings suggest that the participants contextualised the creativity, empowerment and authenticity of the contest in highly nuanced ways. Some women believed they were supporting the feminist cause, while others recognised that there was an exploitative nature to the contest. Several women stated that they felt empowered, and they all endorsed Dove in the process. Duffy concludes that since every participant contextualised their participation differently, and made the commodified empowerment work for them, the contest could successfully both empower and exploit (Duffy, 2010).

This coin clearly has two sides. We could consider commodity activism a paradoxical strategy, carrying with it unrealistic promises created to fool us into consumption; not for a social cause but for a profit (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012:3). It is easy to shrug this off as feminism undone, depoliticised and hijacked, a manipulative strategy meant to make us dip into our wallets.

However, we can also understand it as a new and innovative mode of activism, a popular form of resistance in a social and political landscape constantly in flux (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012:3). We can view it as a feminism full of contradictions and tensions, but still useful, and one step in the right direction.

Perhaps it is not capitalist power on the one hand and popular resistance on the other, but a little bit of both. Hypocritical, yet a meaningful and productive force.

What do women think?

When it comes to feminism in advertising, Gill continuously stresses the importance of the audience perspective, which she considers a crucial area of study in order to make sense of the complexities and contradictions in these postfeminist advertisements (2008; 2007b:25). While arguing that advertisements have a *huge* influence on audiences as well as on the contemporary media landscape

(2007b:73), she also subscribes to the idea of polysemic readings of texts and the view that advertisements cannot *impose* meaning on us (ibid:50). Thus, this huge influence must come in many different variations.

When speaking of media influence, McRobbie argues in a way that make young woman appear uncritical. Analysing an advertisement for Wonderbra, which she takes to be an example of the undoing of feminism, McRobbie argues that ‘the younger female viewer’ is not angry and critical when she sees this advertisement despite the fact that it is clearly sexist. According to McRobbie, the new female subject uses her freedom to withhold critique and stay silent, in order to fit in (2004). This could be argued to be a straw man argument, and therefore only as strong as the realness of the subject McRobbie has created. This argument relies on young women being uncritical, because otherwise the argument does not hold. If we discover that women do in fact engage critically the straw man ceases to exist and the argument falls apart.

There have been few audience reception studies done in relation to these types of campaigns. One campaign, however, has been more explored than others: Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty. With this campaign, launched in 2004, Dove claims to want to make women realise their natural beauty. It has been blamed for failing to liberate women from an oppressive beauty ideology (Johnston and Taylor, 2008; Murray, 2012), while others have claimed it has been effective in questioning social norms and body ideals (Infanger, 2009).

According to Banet-Weiser, this campaign is clearly a product of a postfeminist environment, full of contradictions, asking consumers to act politically (as feminists) by supporting the brand and buying Dove's beauty products. Dove's promotion of self-esteem and “real beauty” while capitalising on women's insecurities is precisely the type of paradox one can expect to meet in this postfeminist environment (2012a). Obviously, it is difficult to merge the idea of a corporation selling beauty products (such as intensive firming cream) with one that claims to want to critique the beauty industry – of which Dove itself forms an integral part. As Gill and Elias point out, many of the companies using this strategy are the same ones who are invested in maintaining female body dissatisfaction (2014).

It is undoubtedly easy to criticise the hypocrisy of this campaign and others like it, and question their influence on gender equality outside the screen. However, the studies exploring audience reception suggest this is not an either/or-phenomena.

The young feminists interviewed by Taylor et al (2016) seem to somewhat make peace with the idea that feminist messages in advertising is a necessary paradox to live with. While most women agreed that Dove's campaign was not truly feminist, in a pragmatic sense they still considered it "better than nothing". The women expressed contradictory feelings towards the campaign, feeling it was inspiring yet frustrating, and many women expressed a powerlessness when it came to imagining alternatives to feminist ideals being incorporated into marketing (2016).

Stokvold and Andersson (2013) identify similar themes in their thesis: the Swedish women interviewed considered the campaign one step in the right direction, but questioned the main goal of increasing commerce by using feminist ideals. Similarly, the women interviewed by Millard (2009) agreed that Dove's campaign is a gimmick to increase commerce, but that it still has value and that it adds something to the world of advertising.

There is a 'on the one hand, but on the other hand' type of reasoning among the women interviewed in audience research conducted in the area, which clearly shows that this strategy cannot be ruled off as merely a manipulative use of feminism. It seems unproductive to cast these campaigns off as a destroyed and empty feminism meant to lure us into consumption. Female consumers need to be given more credit than that. To call this feminism manipulative assumes an audience that is easily manipulated.

These reception studies all suggest that women do critically engage with the campaign, and challenge McRobbie's claim that young women consume media content uncritically. At the very least it rules out generalisations. The women interviewed in these studies are not tricked into consumption, nor are they completely satisfied with feminism being used in this way. They experience mixed feelings: this strategy is not ideal, but it is better than nothing.

Conclusion

The incorporation of feminist values into mainstream media and advertising has been explored by many scholars, and is a long-running, still current and increasingly relevant debate among feminist writers. With a few exceptions, the verdicts are harsh: when feminism is used in this way it is no longer real. It is a deflated feminism with the sole purpose of making us consume.

However, when women are asked a much more nuanced image appears. It seems women do interact critically with these advertising campaigns, seeing them as paradoxical and recognising their commercial purpose, yet considering them one step in the right direction. Similarly, one can expect women to be aware of the content they interact with on social media. After all, we are not robotic machines compulsively hitting the like button whenever a comforting message infiltrates our feed.

With one exception (Duffy, 2010), the audience studies on femvertising do not focus on how women might utilise these campaigns. The conversations focus on how they interpret the messages, but not on whether the messages make them act in a certain way. This is where this thesis seeks to make a contribution by joining Duffy in trying to identify the social mechanisms put in play when young women are faced with advertisements asking them to act, and how they view that request. Do they believe that sharing an advertisement video can advance the feminist cause?

Analysing Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, Murray argues that while feminists might welcome this campaign as a positive change in the advertising landscape, it is not the feminist task to support corporate strategies aimed at creating brand attachment. The feminist task, Murray argues, is to struggle for social changes that revolutionise structures in society (2013). In other words: this is not true feminist activism.

However, after interviewing young women about feminism, Budgeon concludes that feminism nowadays may operate as a form of decentralised resistance. Through small everyday actions young women do contribute to push feminism forwards. These women might not march on the streets, or even call themselves feminists, but they still practice a form of 'micro-politics'. They speak of both women as a group, and about the responsibilities of each individual (2001). Could we view activities on social media as a form of micro-revolutionising?

It seems highly unproductive to speak of feminism and feminist actions as real or unreal, when we will never, and should never, agree on the meaning of these terms. This thesis will attempt to move beyond a 'this is and that isn't feminist' discussion (Braithwaite, 2002) by recognising the diversity of feminism and exploring what happens on an individual level when a woman is confronted with a feminism packaged to sell.

My approach to unpacking femvertising

Before digging into the method and methodological approach, I find it an appropriate time to situate myself within this research.

In the previous chapter, I clarified which strand of postfeminism I draw on. If I may resort to some navel-gazing, this positioning has a lot to do with my own relationship to feminism. I am 27 years old and have grown up in the aftermath of the second wave, which represents a feminism I very much respect but cannot identify with. My feminist identity is packed with contradictions. I care about my appearance, while seeing the problems of society's focus on female beauty. I joyfully watch series like *Sex and the City*, while recognising the strange mix of women's independence with a constant reliance on men. I can applaud an advertisement celebrating women's self-esteem, while feeling sceptical about its true aim. Indeed, I feel empowered when told I can be anything and everything, while also wondering why I am the one who needs this boost and not my male peers.

The feminism I see around me is not a dead anti-feminism, but very much alive and evolving. It is as diverse and multifaceted as feminists themselves.

The acknowledgement of my own standpoint is important as I agree with the critique that objectivity is an illusion (Davies and Spencer, 2012: 2). I do not claim to be on an unbiased path to knowledge, but I also reject that the acceptance of subjectivity means giving up on knowledge construction. I believe that this acknowledgement can be of analytical help. Furthermore, not acknowledging it would be to hide important facts about the main analytical tool in this thesis; me. I am the interpretive subject and as such my influence will be pervasive (Bruhn Jensen, 2012: 266).

Choosing in-depth interviews as a method

Since I argue that expressions of feminism are as diverse as women are, I realise that if I wish to understand the reactions and actions generated by these campaigns, the most logical step is to turn to women and ask them. In this respect, my research borrows from feminist standpoint theory, drawing on the notion that knowledge is socially situated and that we can reach more truthful accounts of the world by turning to marginalised people and start off from their experiences and activities (Harding, 2004). The knowledge I am seeking cannot be found by

performing the 'God trick' as famously put by Donna Haraway (1988) and assume an objective view of the world from above. I am not interested in creating straw women to build an argument, but want to seek an understanding of the complex meaning-making practices of these campaigns with respect to those who are considered part of the target audience.

As Brinkmann and Kvale put it: 'If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?' (2015:1). It is through the qualitative research interview one can attempt to understand the world from people's point of view.

There are few rules or standard methodological conventions for qualitative interview research, and it is hard to do well (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:19). The lack of standardised procedure demands a high level of skill from the researcher and the process of piloting was one way of strengthening it. According to Ann Gray, piloting is invaluable as it helps you decide on your approach (2003:102). Piloting can provide important warnings about where your research can fail and tell you if your chosen method is appropriate. While a pilot study does not guarantee a successful end result, it does increase the chances significantly (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001).

The pilot interviews were done over the phone, with two 20 year old women. These interviews are not included as part of my data, but have contributed to the final shaping of my approach, as I quickly identified some problems with my earlier scope. For example, I realised it was insufficient to only discuss one campaign, as the conversation quickly dies if the respondents in no way relate to the content. The interest has not been to analyse a specific campaign, but rather the phenomenon of femvertising as a whole.

Furthermore, piloting allowed me to understand the difficulties of demanding from your respondents the ability to speak rationally, and almost from the outside, about everyday practices such as viewing and sharing videos online. After conducting these pilot interviews I decided that all interviews would need to be done face to face, with a computer at hand, in order for the interviewee to be able to show me, if needed. This adds an ethnographic touch to the study, almost observational. The computer was not always used by the interview subject herself, but often enough for it to be worthwhile and for me to get a better understanding of their online behaviour.

The piloting helped me decide to do individual interviews instead of focus groups. The contextualisation of these advertisements seemed so dependent on the woman's life situation that I felt I would miss an important nugget by putting

several women together. While group discussions could have unraveled other interesting dimensions, I am not certain the personal contextualisations I was seeking would have emerged in that setting.

The choice to do individual interviews connects to the postfeminist approach; exploring mediated expressions of feminism from an individual perspective. The multiplicity of feminism that I assume could be claimed to decrease consistency and reliability, but since my aim is not to make representational claims I find it necessary to recognise the various and diffuse ways feminism can be exercised. As Budgeon notes, by analytically moving away from the understanding of women and feminism in collective terms means we must start from every woman's experience (2011:282).

Doing research: from recruiting to analysing

To recruit I posted a request on Facebook looking for women, aged 15 to 35⁵, who were interested in gender equality and/or feminism and who used social media.

According to The Internet Foundation in Sweden, this age group (16-35) considers the internet the most important source of information, uses it to seek political information and are active in passing on content to others (Findahl and Davidsson, 2015).

There are many reasons why I wanted to recruit women who had a pre-existing interest in feminist issues. Again, if I may resort to a subjective perspective, I have always felt feminism to be a very affectional political stance. To be a feminist is to invest emotionally in beliefs and values that lie close to your heart. It penetrates many aspects of your life and it is personal as well as political. To ask women how it feels when feminism is used in advertising requires them to have a vested interest in the feminist cause. If I were to ask women who did not care about these issues, it is unlikely they would care about this marketing strategy just as they might not care about advertisers using the environment or anti-racism to sell. Therefore, I wanted to direct my questions towards women who live and breathe feminism, and who care about the future of it.

⁵ The women were of the following ages: 16, 17, 22, 22, 23, 25, 25, 25, 26, 26, 26, 30, 31 and 35 years old. A shorter presentation of all women can be found in appendix A.

The reason only women were recruited was simply because these videos are targeting a female audience.

There was a high level of interest in participating in the study and I strategically included women in different life stages and with different backgrounds to get a broad range of respondents. This resulted in a great diversity. The women range from hardcore feminist activists who participate in demonstrations, give lectures on the topic and use social media to engage others, to those who merely reflecting on feminism by themselves and who occasionally would discuss it with friends. Some were anti-capitalist and therefore anti-advertising, while others enjoyed advertising as a cultural form in its own right. Some were students, others were working. The youngest was 16, the oldest 35. All were Swedish, but many had roots in other parts of the world. Some focused merely on the power struggles between men and women, while others pointed out intersectional perspectives such as class, ethnicity and disabilities. All women were attending or had attended university education.

The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I had general areas⁶ I wanted to touch upon, but these were so diffuse that the interviews could almost be characterised as unstructured. Depending on where the conversation led, I fed the conversation with videos⁷, showing an average of six videos per interview. With an arsenal of videos and questions at my disposal I was able to cater for every conversational eventuality. Topics included how the women felt about the advertisements, if they felt they were a fair representation of feminism, if advertising is an appropriate arena for feminism and what kind of potential they saw in these advertisements.

Every interview ran as long as it needed to, until we both felt everything was said and topics started reoccurring. The interviews ranged from 50 minutes to just over an hour and a half. I told all women to contact me if they had any more

6 See appendix B for the interview guide, which informed the research

7 The following videos were showed in the interviews: "Like a girl" (Always, 2014), 'Unstoppable' (Always, 2015), 'Imagine the possibilities' (Barbie, 2015), 'Inspire her mind' (Verizon Wireless, 2014), Dove's 'Evolution' (Zephoria, 2006), 'Real beauty sketches' (Dove US, 2013), 'Speak beautiful' (Dove US, 2015), 'Legacy' (Dove US, 2014), 'Underwear for perfect men' (Dressmann Official, 2015), 'The camp gyno' (HelloFlo, 2013), 'Better for it – inner thoughts' (NikeWomen, 2015), Pantene's 'Not sorry ShineStrong' (Best Ads Channel, 2014), 'Courage is already inside' (Ram Trucks, 2015), 'Own it' (Special K Canada, 2015) and 'More than a number' (SpecialKUS, 2013). Four are described after this chapter, and the rest are described in appendix C.

thoughts but only one woman did so and emailed me to say she had shared two of the videos discussed.

The strategy was to conduct as many interviews as needed to answer my research questions and to be able to fully explore my scope. According to Brinkmann and Kvale, a researcher needs as many interview subjects as necessary to find out what she needs to know, but that in most cases the number of respondents in small-scale qualitative studies amounts to around 15 (2015:140). After only a handful of interviews, patterns started to emerge. After 14 interviews I decided to stop collecting data, start analysing and then rethink the sample size. When I started analysing it became clear that the data I had gathered was enough to see both patterns as well as individual contextualisations. I therefore decided to not go back to interviewing, but move fully into the analytical phase.

All interviews were transcribed, printed and read multiple times. Half-way through the analysis, I went back to the recordings to make sure I had not missed important pieces such as revealing pauses, tone of voice or laughter. Re-listening became a way of bringing life to the interviews again.

Using colours to visualise themes, I identified key areas to focus on. Many of these overlapped and I had to return to the data multiple times to make sense of the patterns. A comforting thought at this stage was Ann Gray's claim that the richer the data, the more open it is to multiple interpretations (2003:147). This openness required me to be experimental while analysing, exploring different paths, often meeting dead ends and constantly questioning my conclusions.

Throughout the process of data collection and analysing, I developed my theoretical framework further, letting it feed off the data and vice versa. In a way this research is inspired by grounded theory, as I let the data 'speak to me' before deciding on which theoretical concepts to work with (Bruhn Jensen, 2012:278). I did not want to shoehorn in a theoretical perspective not suitable for the data. Instead, I identified themes and then went back to the literature in order to find concepts and frameworks to work with.

Going beyond reception

An important aspect was that I asked the women if they would share the videos on social media. In today's digital media climate, it seems insufficient to merely analyse the *meeting* between people and content, when the relationship does not stop there. We do not merely view content and engage with our minds, we share,

talk about and allow it to influence us in different ways depending on our context. With regards to commodity activism this becomes particularly clear, as the content asks us to act in a specific way, to stand up for ideological principles and buy products attached to those principles (whether it is coffee to help save the rainforest or tampons to demonstrate the importance of girls' confidence) or spread the word by using a pre-designed hashtag or simply passing on a video. Thus, to simply ask women what meaning they make of this type of content would be a job half done.

Celia Lury suggests that this type of social marketing requires us to view the relationship between producer and consumer as a relationship based on exchange, and not merely see it in terms of stimulus-response. The mere presence of corporations on social media signifies this change (Banet-Weiser, 2012b:7), and these campaigns are dependent on people engaging. Therefore, it seemed necessary to include discussions about what happens *after* the content has been viewed and judged.

However, my choice to interview feminist-interested women about sharing practices is likely to have strengthened what sometimes is called the third person effect (Eisend, 2015). This set-up encouraged the women to speak about these videos' influence on others, rather than on themselves, as the decision to share factors in your own audiences online. It seemed the respondents often believed that the videos would mean more for those who might not know or care about feminism as much as they did. It was hard to avoid this approach as I was interested in both the consumption and the circulation of these texts, but I believe this limitation has somewhat mitigated the conclusions. Still, as the analysis will show, this approach revealed other dimensions, as the interviewees - perhaps unknowingly - revealed a lot about themselves and their own view on the videos while discussing third parties.

Validity: painting a fair picture of reality

'Wow, it is so interesting to hear myself talk about these things!' Melanie exclaimed half-way through my interview with her. I could only agree: it was interesting to hear her reasoning, and clearly not just for me.

This realisation by Melanie pinpoints how difficult it is to get a true picture of how the interview subject judges these videos, as some opinions might be shaped then and there. According to Bruhn Jensen, one of the difficulties with interviewing is that people do not always say what they think, or mean what they

say. An interview might be the first time the interviewees articulate their view on a certain phenomenon (Bruhn Jensen, 2012:270).

It is important to consider what kind of knowledge that can be obtained through qualitative interviews. Brinkmann and Kvale separate between *knowledge collection* and *knowledge construction* where the researcher can be viewed as either a miner, mining for knowledge that is already there and merely hidden, or a traveller, exploring the topic together with the interview subject and constructing knowledge together (2015:57). Here, I adopt a social constructionist view and view myself as a traveller. My aim has been to construct a shared understanding of this phenomenon together with these women in an approach referred to as 'intersubjectivity' (ibid: 365). This has allowed me to explore the meaning of these advertisements, recognising the problems of objectivity while respecting both mine and the interviewees' subjective understandings.

However, I must recognise that not only the interviewees construct their understanding and interpretation, but that I do too. This interpretation of other people's interpretations is referred to as double hermeneutics (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:354), and could justly be labelled an epistemological limitation. It cannot claim that my interpretations are any more valid than anyone else's, and that I produce knowledge any more "real" than others. This becomes even more complex when taking into account the specific context in which these understandings were constructed.

Context is crucial in understanding accounts given in interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:103). Clearly, the interview itself is an unusual situation for most people. These women had to be taken out of their everyday context, where advertisements constantly penetrate their lives and where sharing a video can be done swiftly while lying in the sofa, and asked to lean forward and critically engage with the advertisements. This, I believe, has led to a self-fulfilled prophecy. I assume women to be critical, but I also ask them to be. The difficulty with respondents articulating their own experiences (Gray, 2003:200) means I cannot be sure of how authentic their accounts are. It connects to Goffman's notion of impression management, which holds that people both consciously and subconsciously manage and try to influence the perception of their image in order to give a good impression (1959).

It must also be noted that simply stating that you will share media content does not mean you actually will or would, which is another aspect to keep in mind.

However, lacking the opportunity to situate myself inside the interview subjects' minds, asking them to think out loud is the best I can do. As a researcher, I have

to settle with only capturing a version of the truth and then represent this for others to consider (Gray, 2003:21). Asking women was the most valid method in order to get a fair and at least partly representative image of reality. The fact that I gave everyone time and opportunity to revisit topics might have increased the likelihood of their accounts being in correspondence with their true emotions. Furthermore, if every context is constructed then what makes an interview context less valid than any other?

Ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) urges researchers to consider four ethical principles when conducting a study: providing the interview subjects with proper *information* regarding the study and their participation (informationskravet), obtaining their *consent* (samtyckeskravet), protecting their *confidentiality* (konfidentialitetskravet), and to only *use* the data for research purposes (nyttjandekravet).

All women were informed of the terms of their involvement before the interviews. They were informed of the total sample size, and I loosely explained the aim of the study, but could not give exact parameters as I was not certain of which direction this study would take at that stage. Consent was obtained verbally. Two participants were minors, but since they were both over the age of 15 their parents' permission was not needed in accordance with Vetenskapsrådet's recommendations (2002:9).

All women were granted anonymity and therefore their names have been changed in this thesis. While the results were discussed in detail with my supervisor, and more broadly with a student friend, I would not refer to the women by their full name or in any way give information that could reveal who they were.

I was open with the fact that while the women were granted both anonymity and confidentiality, the interviews would be transcribed and their accounts interpreted and analysed by me. All interviewees were offered to read the transcripts to make sure these were loyal to their statements, as well as listen to the recordings from their own interviews. The majority of them availed of this.

Beyond these principles, I have considered the ethical consequences of my own position as a feminist woman. I share many attributes with the women interviewed, but we are still different people with different feminisms at hand. To think that our shared gender would mean that I understand them any better than

a male counterpart would, would be an oversimplification of the female identity – precisely what I have tried to sidestep in this thesis.

Related to that, I have reflected on how much of myself I should let shine through in the interviews. In many ways these interviews were like conversations, which is common for qualitative interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:27). However, even though it can be described as a conversation there is a power dimension that must be acknowledged, when one person controls the recordings, takes the material home and interprets it (ibid:37). While reading the transcripts it dawned on me that I had often shared my own personal stories during the interview. Perhaps this made them open up more, as it would make the interview even more conversation-like, but is it ethical? Did I use myself and my own feminism as a bargaining chip to get more from them?

In all fairness, I do think that all these women had enough awareness of the situation that prevented me from involuntarily taking advantage of them.

The videos: four examples of femvertising

To give the reader an understanding of what type of videos that were discussed during the interviews, four of them⁸ are described below.

Always' 'Like a girl'

Part of Always' #LikeAGirl campaign, which is an 'epic battle to stop the drop in confidence girls experience during puberty' (Always, 2016), this video shines light on young girls' self-esteem.

In the advertisement, a number of adults and teens in a TV studio are asked by the director to run, fight and throw 'like a girl'. The participants do so in an overly girly manner, thus ridiculing girls. Next, young girls come in and are asked to perform the same actions. When they do it, however, they do not pretend or exaggerate. They simply do it as they normally would, putting their best effort into it. 'When did doing something like a girl become an insult?' Always asks, and goes on to claim that the company wants to change that (Always, 2014). This

⁸ The remaining eleven videos are briefly explained in appendix C.

message directly echoes the one conveyed in Iris Young's article 'Throwing like a girl', in which she argues that girls grow up falsely learning that they are less physically capable than boys, thus making the phenomenon of 'throwing like a girl' culturally and socially constructed (2005).

This advertisement won an Emmy for outstanding commercial in 2015 (Diaz, 2015), and SheKnows Media's award for best femvertising video in the category 'Next generation' (Monllos, 2015). It has over 61 million views on YouTube, along with almost 40 000 comments, and a total of 80 million views worldwide (Griner and Ciambriello, 2015). When it was showed during Super Bowl in 2014 it was declared the winner of the evening by social media analysts as it received over 400 000 mentions on various social media platforms within just a few hours (Bayley, 2015).

Dove's 'Real beauty sketches'

This video is part of Dove's campaign for real beauty, aiming to make women realise their natural beauty (Dove, 2016).

In the video, a forensic artist with experience from the FBI sketches pictures of a number of women, based on how they describe themselves to him. He then draws new pictures of the same women, but this time based on how strangers describe them. When the women are brought in to see the result they realise they have not understood how others see them. The video ends with the words 'You are more beautiful than you think' (Dove US, 2013).

This video has been viewed more than 165 million times and was the most shared video advertisement in 2013. It brought home 19 awards at the Cannes Lions, including the Titanium Grand Prix and the prize for 'Best use of social media' (Siddiqi, 2013). It also won the American marketing award 'the Grand Effie' and a 'Grand Brand Genius' from Adweek (McMains, 2014).

Barbie's 'Imagine the possibilities'

This video is part of Barbie's 'You can be anything'-campaign, with the proclaimed aim to empower young girls in their discovery of themselves (Barbie, 2016).

In the video, a number of girls are shown in adult situations; guiding a group through a museum, teaching at university and coaching a football team. Lines like 'the dog brain is smaller than the human brain, cause there is no high school for the dog' and 'knees up like a unicorn!' make the adults around these young girls giggle in excitement. At the end of the video, the viewer is made to realise that the girls are in fact only imagining these situations with the help of her Barbie dolls. The video ends with the words 'When a girl plays with Barbie, she imagines everything she can become' (Barbie, 2015).

On YouTube, this video has been viewed over 20 million times. YouTube Ads Leaderboard selected it as one of the most iconic ads of 2015, and it won YouTube's advertisement contest in the category 'TheYouTubeAd That Restores Your Faith in Humanity Category' (Mattel Inc, 2015).

Verizon's 'Inspire her mind'

Verizon, an American broadband and telecommunications company, launched the advertisement 'Inspire her mind' in 2014 to encourage girls' love for science, engineering and math. It sought to address the gap between the amount of girls interested in science in school, and the few who actually pursue it as a career.

In this video, girls are shown doing different adventurous things and being discouraged as a result. A girl handling a drill is told to hand that to her brother, a girl climbing outside is warned her dress might get dirty, and a girl who built a mini solar system is told that 'this science project has gone too far'. At the end of the video, a teenage girl approaches a poster framed in glass, advertising a science fair. The viewer might think she is contemplating attending, but instead she uses the glass as a mirror while putting on lip gloss. The video, seemingly directed towards parents, asks its audience if it isn't time we start telling girls that they are pretty brilliant too (Verizon Wireless, 2014).

The video has been viewed just over 4 million times on YouTube.

Tool or theft? Exploring the reactions towards femvertising

In this chapter both the variety of reactions the women expressed, as well as common patterns in these reactions, will be presented. It will be a balancing act between letting every woman leave her stamp on the final conclusions and also highlighting the many similarities in their approaches to this phenomenon.

Almost every woman interviewed had come across one or several of these videos before, or were at least familiar with a campaign (most often Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty). Some women had already shared videos after first seeing them, or said they would when asked in the interview. It became clear, however, that sharing these videos does not merely come down to the quality of the content but also to your digital behaviour. As Maja, 16, replied when asked if she would share one of the videos: 'No. It's a good video so I don't really know why. But it's against a habit', or Ann, 26, who said that she did not need a video or a hashtag to make a political statement.

The belief in one's own power to influence online varied greatly between the women, ranging from Alexandra, 17, who believed that every individual's action online has an impact, and Cecilia, 30, who stated that 'our worlds are only as big as our Instagram feeds', to Anita, 25, who said that since everyone shares so much it is unnecessary to do it yourself as 'no one can be bothered to read'.

Only two women stated that they would not share advertisements out of principle to not run errands for corporations. For the other 12, this was secondary to the message the advertisement carried, often with a reasoning that it is too hard to avoid passing on messages that benefit someone else. For them, it was not the format that was of importance, but instead how much value that was transmitted through its message.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first will centre on advertising as a feminist resource, and the second on the ambivalent reactions these videos generated. These were the two strongest themes emerging from the data.

Advertising as a (compromised) feminist resource

The first part of the analysis discusses how these videos were viewed and referred to as resources, albeit compromised resources, and how discussions about sharing them or not revealed what potential they might carry.

This comment from Melanie, a freelance lecturer and feminist activist, highlights a theme running through the interviews: the belief that this version of feminism might reach non-feminists:

Everything that reaches people who might not read or aren't interested is a huge progress that contributes significantly to society. Because then you invite those questions and thoughts into areas where the discussions might never have been held, in front of the TV on a weekend or with the family. I really think that has a lot more power than books or lectures.

There's a certain kind of people who come to my lectures, they have a certain knowledge, they are somewhat interested. So if you can reach out with such simple means, it will do everything in the world.

(Melanie, 23)

The hopefulness that Melanie expresses here was carried by *every* woman interviewed; that when feminism infiltrates advertising, a genre of the media often considered invasive and hard to avoid, it has the potential to spark an interest in someone, somewhere.

A feminism packaged in a way that makes the ideology and its values easy to understand was believed to have the potential to 'open eyes' (Maja, Ann, Joanna, Cecilia, Stina), 'wake people' (Alice), 'switch on a light-bulb' (Alexandra), 'awaken a thought' (Julia), 'create awareness' (Viola, Sara) and 'set thoughts in motion' (Maria). This made many of the women positive to sharing one or several of the videos, as spreading this content means participating in awakening others from their ignorance. It seems the ability to possibly make a difference – even if just reaching one or two people in your network – was a strong reason for this type of engagement. Always' video 'Like a girl' stood out as an advertisement believed to be able to have this impact, often credited for being well made, clear and powerful.

Those who wanted to share a video wanted to do so not only to inspire and strengthen like-minded people, but also with the hope that these commodified feminist texts could stimulate others to re-evaluate their views on gender roles and

feminism. Many women had specific people in mind who they felt should see it, but as these examples illustrate, the influence they sought varied:

R: I would have hoped that people saw it and started thinking. Especially people who might need to.

I: Are there those people on your Facebook?

R: I think so. People who think feminism is just for girls who harass men, who haven't gotten a clue what it's about. I would really like them to see this.

(Alexandra, 17, about Always' 'Like a girl')

R: I have shared it on Facebook, this 'Run like a girl'.

I: Why?

R: Partly so that others in my surrounding, women, can feel identification and get the eye-opener I got. That we constantly have to hear this [...] And I was moved and thought others would like to see it. And also that there are people around me who need to see it, who need these three minutes to piece it together with other things.

(Stina, 25, about Always' 'Like a girl')

One of my sisters is quite... She loves stuff like changing tires on the car. Like all those things that actually aren't... Like building shacks out in the forest, those things that aren't super feminine. I think it would be good to show her this, to like, show her that it's okay, that there's nothing wrong with it.

(Maja, 16, about Verizon's 'Inspire her mind')

That these advertisements could both strengthen women, as well as help mainstream the debate, was echoed in many interviews. Some women were more enthusiastic than others, like Melanie above, who thought that if the challenging of norms in advertising was done in the right way it could 'do everything in the world' and that we should not view advertising merely as 'a crook within capitalism' but try to view it as an asset too. Others were more careful in their optimism, like Alice, 35, who feared that her audiences on Facebook would stay

in their anti-feminist bubble regardless, but that she would still share Verizon's 'Inspire her mind', feeling that her responsibility ended there.

Not one woman thought that these videos would revolutionise the world, but many seemed to put them in their feminist tool box and think of them as a potential resource to use alongside others.

As touched upon in the literature review, the postfeminist generation is often blamed for being too focused on individual pursuits and for not caring enough about the common goals of feminism (Showden, 2009). This is encapsulated in many of these campaigns, where the empowerment aimed for is personal and individual, and not collective and civic (Banet-Weiser, 2012b:17), urging women to improve their self-esteem, take up more space and realise their inner and natural beauty. This is criticised by many (see e.g. Crymble (2012), Gill (2007b), Lazar (2014) and McRobbie (2009) and used as an example of why this commodified feminism cannot contribute to any real social change. However, as Budgeon (2001) concludes after interviewing young women about feminism, the individual perspective does not always emerge at the expense of the collective. Rather, the two perspectives co-exist.

This duality was evident in this interview data as well. While some women said they felt empowered on a personal level, feeling strengthened (Maja), a 'hell yeah'-feeling (Viola), stoked (Alice) and inspired to change (Alexandra), the majority of women spoke about the empowerment of *others*, as Cecilia, 30, clearly expresses here with regards to Always' 'Like a girl':

R: There's a message in it that's damn power... what do you say? Empowering.

I: Do *you* feel empowered?

R: Good question. I feel like it's more directed towards younger girls, but that's also because I feel like I'm already aware of these issues.

Partly, this could be due to the third-person effect (Eisend, 2015), and that these women perceive the advertisements as having a bigger effect on other people than on themselves. However, talking about these videos as resources to pass around to reach, convince and, perhaps most importantly *invite* suggests a different kind of empowerment. It seems self-empowerment does not have to be ruled off as an empty ploy that will not benefit the collective, but can also be viewed as a collectivising force strengthening the movement, democratising it through

accessibility. The fact that this feminism has been packaged and made easier is in itself empowering to those who are not already accepted into the feminist circle.

When the women speak about how these advertisements can influence *others* they are hinting at an empowered ability to nourish their own movement and standpoints with new recruits, and should thus be considered a counter-weight to the belief that this use of feminism merely enables a meaningless self-empowerment reached through consumption.

Sharing content online reflects one's judgement of its value, which is why this dimension of the analysis is so revealing. Of interest here is not how the videos might influence others, but how these women viewed the videos' prospective and how this in turn made them act. As Jenkins et al argue, the reasons to spread content online are multiple and complex which is why speaking of content as viral fails to recognise the decision-making happening in front of every screen (2013:20-21). They argue that communities tap into creative resources available online and use them for their own purposes, pursuing their own agendas (ibid:292), which is evident here.

While there were variations among the women with regards to *how much* these advertisements could impact, everyone carried a hope that maybe it could influence slightly. Even Amanda, who was highly sceptical of this marketing strategy had a somewhat positive outlook:

Hopefully [the videos] can plant something, even if it doesn't impact so much in-depth. It could plant something that someone else picks up. If there are loads of them and you become fed with them, one could hope that some woman sees them and wants to get involved. And maybe there is a sensible organisation or network who picks them up and then they get another perspective and become more... get their eyes opened and get a more critical perspective.

(Amanda, 26)

Here, Amanda displays remarkable resourcefulness by opposing this commercial use of feminism, but still seeing possibilities when companies choose to do it. The idea that a woman would see advertisements carrying feminist messages, turn to a feminist organisation nearby and exercise her critical thinking cannot be described as anything but pure optimism.

Throughout the interview, Amanda was adamant that we do not have to accept capitalism and roll over, but rather learn to live with it and make the best of it. The smaller actors in society, like grassroots movements (Amanda herself was

involved in at least two), could pick up the pieces that advertisers leave behind, walk on the road the corporations have paved, filled with people who have had their eyes opened to feminism but who require more stimuli to become a true activist. This implies that even the more radical feminist, eager to revolutionise the patriarchal structures that sustain the current gender order, is willing to work within the existing framework and even sees ways of benefiting from it.

‘It feels very American but you probably have to accept that’⁹

Many women were indeed positive towards feminism in advertising, seeing the combination as suitable and in some cases even necessary. One factor in particular generated this response: its reach, both in terms of the number of eyeballs but also in terms of reaching new audiences.

Right now, we are so far from being equal that the feminist struggle, and the struggle for gender equality, probably has to be fought on several different levels. If a company chooses to go into it and speak out, demonstrate inequalities and attitudes, then why not? They are already such big players, companies, they are already out there. Why not use the reach they have to reach out with a good message?

(Ann, 26)

Those who are already adherents probably find lots of criticism for all sorts of things here. But with new target groups they might start to question or ‘oh, why is it like this?’, and like, that’s the biggest strength with this. Because it’s such a simple format, watching a video for a couple of minutes.

(Maria, 26)

All women recognised that this version of feminism is not perfect, and that it has as its main purpose to sell products. In relation to different videos, this commercialised feminism was described as ‘easily absorbed’ (Alice), ‘superficial’ (Amanda), ‘not feminism full-out’ (Stina), ‘not very challenging’ (Joanna), ‘disingenuous’ (Melanie), ‘Americanized’ (Maria), ‘simple’, ‘twisted’ (Anita), ‘mild’ and ‘lacking political force’ (Julia). Yet, despite this, all women agreed that these alterations do not automatically mean it is no longer feminism. With regards

⁹ Maria, 26, about Always’ ‘Like a girl’.

to different advertisements, this commercialised feminism was considered to stand for one part, or one version, of the movement and ideology and therefore at least partly representative.

Common for all women but one (Amanda) was that they recognised, with mixed amounts of displeasure, disappointment and pragmatism that feminism might have to be adjusted in order to reach new target groups.

You get a better analysis in an article but if people aren't gonna read that anyway, because it's not as easily accessible, then maybe it's better to share films like these than to do nothing at all. No one has got the patience any more, me neither [...] I would rather see film clips without an aim to sell behind, but this might be a necessary adjustment to make it easily accessible.

(Julia, 22)

I might not agree with myself at the end of this argument, but I do think that feminism could be marketed a bit more, not commercialised, but what the hell, become a bit more adjusted to fit the market [...] Ultimately, if you're to push a political campaign or struggle you need to be able to sell it, get people into it, otherwise you won't get anywhere.

(Cecilia, 30)

That lots of academics are sitting on a lot of difficult words is not going to help someone who hasn't even gotten half a foot in. But if you see it in a simple format where my little sister can talk about it just as well as my mother or my brother, then that is where change can happen, we can meet and discuss something [...] My five year old brother could probably absorb this message without a problem.

(Melanie, 23, about Always' 'Like a girl')

This commodification as a necessity also ties in with Hains' study (2013), and with Karlyn's experiences in the classroom (2006), that commercialised and popularised feminism can be a way of putting gender on the table, and that a "lighter" feminism can function as an introduction to feminism. While many women noted that this feminism was skewed, this was not viewed as something purely negative. Instead it was often viewed as the reason it could succeed in reaching more people. Advertisers package, dramatize and make it a bit cheesy, but as Alice noted 'they know what they are doing' and 'they build it up so nicely'.

When Van Zoonen (2005) discusses entertaining citizenship, a citizenship made pleasurable by mixing politics with popular culture, she does not include advertising as a genre within the popular. However, her theory still has value, as products of popular culture and advertising involve many similar ingredients, such as dramatization, realism and simplification. Both are cultural products with monetary purposes, borrowing from our everyday life while supplying us with inspiration on how to live (O'Donohoe, 2001). Thus, when van Zoonen argues that popular culture 'needs to be acknowledged as a relevant resource for political citizenship [...] that can make citizenship more pleasurable, more engaging, and more inclusive' (2005:151), one could transpose this idea to the relationship of feminism and advertising.

Many women did however, like Amanda above, express concern that the feminist interest sparked by these advertisements might not be very deep. Van Zoonen uses political drama series as an example of how popular culture can be a resource for political engagement, arguing that shows like *The West Wing* can help people understand and reflect on politics (2005). One could justly argue that a political intrigue running over multiple episodes has more potential to create a substantial interest. However, a limitation I have pointed out elsewhere (Jalakas, 2014a), is that political drama series often attract viewers with a pre-existing political interest and a high level of education. Thus, if a prerequisite is that people are already somewhat interested it is perhaps only reaching the already inaugurated.

Is it possible that short advertisements, often shown to us whether we like it or not, could have greater potential in preaching to the unconverted? After all, the first step towards combating unfair power relations, norms and structures in society is to be made aware of them. Many women directly stated, or hinted at, the influence they believed advertising has on themselves and on society as a whole, claiming that it sets the agenda (Ann), feeds us with stereotypes (Julia), and possesses power over us (Viola). That advertising is influential due to its pervasiveness was brought up in almost every interview, just as Gill suggests that 'adverts are the heart of our social existence' (2007b:73). This is probably one of the key factors contributing to advertising, above any other type of media content, having received so much feminist critique.

This begs the question: if we recognise that negative influences from advertising exist, must we also logically recognise that positive influences can too? This could explain why these advertisements are considered powerful resources. If we accredit advertising as one of the main suppliers of norms and stereotypes, change must start there. If advertising is seen as an intrusive element in our lives, it could also

be seen as an intrusive ideological alarm clock awakening people from their non-feminist slumber.

Ambivalence – a tug of war between cynicism and hope

While it may be concluded that feminism made light can function as a doorway to the movement, this would surely be the case for any similar short video managing to sugar-coat and simplify the complexity that makes up any ideology. The fact that these videos are advertisements for everything from lotion and tampons to cars and dolls makes them more paradoxical, as the very existence of them in many ways strengthens anti-feminist structures. As pointed out by other authors, some corporations using this strategy are invested in maintaining female body dissatisfaction (Banet-Weiser, 2012a; Gill and Elias, 2014).

This brings us to the second theme: ambivalence. As noted among other audiences too (Duffy, 2010; Taylor et al, 2014; Millard, 2009; Stokvold and Andersson, 2013) these advertisements bring forth contradictory feelings, even if not always manifested as clearly as in this quote:

But hell, if I feel empowered? No. Although, it is also empowering that one of the largest brands in the world wants to bring up these issues, or build on them. It's damn cheap that they want to build on it but, I don't know, no, my spontaneous... I think I like it actually. But I'm not agreeing with myself. I think it's difficult.

(Cecilia, 30)

By discussing the ambivalence these campaigns generate their paradoxical and complex nature will become apparent, as they mix good with bad, feminist with anti-feminist, in a way that makes their value harder to judge. This is made even more complicated when taking into account that we all express our feminisms differently and have different feminist yardsticks available to us.

Many studies show that we are suspicious and cynical when watching ads, but that our attitudes are often contradictory. Positive feelings coexist with disbelief (O'Donohoe, 2001). As stated earlier, the aim here is not to condemn these advertisements because they are paradoxical, and therefore can be considered manipulative, but rather to explore what makes us so ambivalent towards them, what hides within that ambivalence, and why we struggle to unpack them in an adequate way.

When disbelief meets hope: advertising literacy at use

Advertisements are inherently polysemic and open to multiple readings and interpretations, not necessarily consistent ones. We cannot experience advertising in isolation from our outside world. O'Donohoe suggests that our attitudes are shaped by our beliefs about how advertising can influence society, as well as our experiences of advertising (2001: 93).

This was noticeable, as many interviewees drew on previous experiences as a way of judging these videos.

R: When I saw that it was Always I thought “oh, typical”, but on the other hand I guess it's good that a company like this does this type of advertising and not the typical “now we have some blue liquid in which we dip the tampons”.

I: So this is still better than what we are used to?

R: Yes, absolutely. I would absolutely say so.

(Maria, 26)

Specifically with regards to car commercials this feels very positive cause you've seen these old car advertisements where they've tried to sell the car with a woman lying on the bonnet. And here they have tried to sell a car to active, adventurous women instead, and they are like strong, adventurous and do different things.

(Joanna, 25, about Ram Trucks' 'Courage is already inside')

I'd much rather see this than many other advertisements that are sexist and where women are used as decoration. It feels better to see this. Rather a mild but pretty meaningless feminism than sexist, absolutely. That's a pleasant development.

(Julia, 22)

I'm very positive to Dove because of their campaign. I've been completely fooled by that! Because they include women in different sizes, in different colours. As soon as I, who have a different skin colour, see a company, a product, make advertising that includes different types of people and where I am represented, I become positive. Because it's so rare.

(Ann, 26)

In ways similar to women interviewed in previous audience studies, the women interviewed here compared these advertisements to others and then concluded that this is one step in the right direction. 'The alternative' was often mentioned in one way or another, signifying a cumulative exposure to advertising. In connection to that pattern, it was also common that the women pragmatically reasoned that products will be advertised regardless, so advertisers might as well do it in this way instead of the more common use of degrading stereotypes. Viola, 31, even suggested that 'if there is anything companies can do, it's to counteract all the years of negative advertising'.

This implies a rooted idea of advertising as a negative influential power in society, with slim models, stereotypes of femininity and a sexualisation of women's bodies. Against that backdrop, these campaigns easily impress, as noted by for example Murray (2013) and Gill and Elias (2014). The fact that simple messages like 'you are beautiful as you are' (Dove), 'girls are just as capable as boys (Always) and 'girls are courageous' (Ram trucks) impress so easily paints quite a sad picture of the advertising women have become used to.

The disbelief these women seem to have against standard advertising is pinned against the hopefulness that these new advertisements carry; a promise of change. Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that corporations capitalise on our ambivalence (2012b: 218) and that could well be true. Many of the women displayed both scepticism and enthusiasm when reading these commodified feminist texts. It seems it is at the heart of this dialectic that their views on this phenomenon are negotiated and constructed: where cynicism meets hope.

Ann, 26, captured this when asked if she believes that Always truly finds the issue of girls' self-esteem important: 'It would be cynical to think something else. I have to hope that, otherwise I think they can stop' and at the very end of the interview she stated that when everything in the world seems so terrible, these videos spread hope. Ann was far from the only one demonstrating a balancing act between a fostered cynicism and a hopefulness. In fact, hope pierced through many of the accounts.

I: Do you think that this message can change anything outside of the video?

R: Yes, I actually think so. Maybe not concretely but it's a start of something, maybe. Maybe start... Well, it's a good basis for something else. But it's not like a real action. But it's good that it exists.

(Anita, 25, about Always' 'Like a girl')

I: Is it a problem that feminism is used to sell? Is it to take advantage of these messages?

R: Yes, of course. But I try to see it as not taking advantage of [the message] to sell, but trying to spread it and *also* sell. But of course, you get a bit fooled by it [...] But at the same time, if other brands see that [Dove] succeeds with this, it will create a positive spiral.

(Maja, 16)

I: Do you think that Always has a genuine will to change?

R: Well, I hope so. I really hope so.

I: But you're sceptical?

R: I'm just... I think I have become... People always say that I am naive. I have become more bitter. A little more cynical [...] But regardless, I think it's great that they are doing this.

(Alice, 35)

Sarah Banet-Weiser suggests that ambivalence does not have to be understood as a problem, defined by doubt and lack of certainty, but could instead be viewed as a carrier of a generative power and potential. She posits that feelings like hope, anxiety, pleasure and desire can be nurtured within ambivalence (2012b:218). Banet-Weiser has an optimistic view on our ambivalence towards branding and marketing, since it means that consumers create meaning that extends beyond the economic goal of the content. This makes our response to these campaigns both unpredictable and unexpected. This can be tied to Jenkins et al.'s notion that online users pursue their own agendas with the material available, using it to fit their own needs (2013:294).

Judging from these interviews, it seems that some of these advertisements are carriers of more than a feminist feel good-message aimed to sell. They are also vehicles of hope, filled with promises of a better and more equal future. Perhaps that is precisely what feminists of this generation need so that is what they will extract.

Feminism undone – for who?

The women's reactions varied greatly depending on which video they saw during the interview, and how it fit into their own context. Some missed the mark, were not viewed as feminist at all or did a poor job in conveying an important message, while others could be great, generate identification and the comforting feeling of 'it isn't just me' (Stina, 25).

To be able to recognise yourself in the video was an important factor by which to judge it.

R: I feel I almost wanna start bawling.

I: Why?

I: I guess it's because of the struggle I've had myself. I've always had to fight for the right to exist within my area. I started thinking computing was fun when I was pretty young, and then people started to tease me [...] It's very painful. I would like other girls not to have to go through that.

(Alice, 35, after seeing Verizon Wireless' 'Inspire her mind')

It bothered me a bit because it was so white, that's all I could think about. It's a fun and catchy advertisement but it falls flat for me when all I see are cookie-cutter white children, with big eyes and flowing blond hair. I find it difficult to have an opinion about this.

(Melanie, 23, after seeing HelloFlo's Camp Gyno')

I've seen this before and I react the same way now and almost begin to cry because... They have found something. It's powerful.

(Stina, 25, after seeing Always' 'Like a girl')

When Stina says 'they have found something' this can be interpreted as 'they have found something that rings true for me', just as Alice clearly expresses. For Melanie, when she does not feel represented it becomes a feminism that is not hers, nor is it *for* her. She is not included and therefore cannot judge it.

Experiencing identification and feeling moved appears to be important reasons to pass on the video in your social network. You were moved, so you see potential in

others being moved too. As Alice put it; 'at least no one will be left unaffected' as a response to why she would share Always' video 'Like a girl'.

Clearly, however, and hardly surprising, content moves us in different ways. For example, Cecilia thought Dove's video 'Legacy' was 'tremendously provoking', as she felt it blamed women for badly influencing their daughters by projecting their bad self-esteem on them. Viola, on the other hand, said she felt very moved by it as it reminded her of her own mother. Viola recognised that the video might strengthen current gender roles, but said she still wanted to share the video with the hope that her friends would see it and stop complaining about their thighs and muffin tops in front of their children.

Similarly, Julia disliked Ram Trucks' 'Courage inside' as she felt it was trying to push the idea that for women to succeed they must become like men, while Alexandra thought it would be great if this video was spread as it could loosen up the strict rules of what a woman or man must be like. Melanie considered Special K's 'Own it' disingenuous and meaningless, while Maja thought it was the best one of all the videos she saw and wanted to share it with her friends to help them feel better about their own bodies. Amanda was disappointed that it was Always, out of all actors in society, that had come out with the message that girls are just as capable as boys and saw it as proof that money equals power. Viola, on the other hand, thought it was great to see a company get actively involved and thought it could strengthen these positive feminist values.

It was evident that each woman extracted different meanings from different videos, depending on how it related to their lives and personal context. This illustrates the difficulties of making generalisations.

This brings us to the theory of feminism undone. Both Gill (2007a) and McRobbie (2009) argue that while feminism is taken into account, many sexist patterns persist in media, popular culture and advertising. In this way feminism can be said to become undone, as displaying an awareness of it thwarts critique and thus disarms the movement, while the same old sexism and discriminatory patterns are kept alive.

To some extent the women interviewed expressed criticism of this kind. One video in particular brought forward this concern; Barbie's 'Imagine the possibilities'. Here, Barbie's campaign serves as a useful example of a mismatch between corporation and the feminist cause. This again hints at a cumulative exposure to brands and advertising, as a previous dislike for Barbie as both brand and product makes it difficult to like their advertisements. The response 'I liked it until I saw it was Barbie' became comically reoccurring in the interviews.

Evidently it is important who is behind the campaign, and how feminism permeates the rest of the company. A feminist message simply does not match a doll who is so thin she would be considered in danger if real and with feet that will not allow her to stand up without wearing heels. If Barbie equals feminism, then what has feminism become?

Always opens up the discussion without saying that the solution is Always, but Barbie says that 'buy Barbie and we'll solve this', This is to steal the discussion about girls and women's rights and equal opportunities for consumption [...] It is as if they equate Barbie with the struggle for feminism and gender equality. It becomes very strange.

(Ann, 26)

I: Does it feel problematic that Barbie tries to take this feminist role?

R: Oh yes, very very problematic. Barbie stands for everything that our feminist generation has gone against. It should be pink, you should talk with a cute voice, have a dream boyfriend, wait for Prince Charming. The norm of what a family should look like [...] Everything packaged in pink.

(Melanie, 23)

'You can be anything', I guess it's a good message. But I'm a bit surprised that it's Barbie who comes out with it. Because it's not exactly what I think of when I think of Barbie, that that's what they promote, what they stand for. I connect it to a freakishly thin... a doll with inhuman proportions.

(Maja, 16)

The reactions to Barbie's campaign highlight a crucial aspect of these women's responses. That even if there is a light feminist message conveyed, it will not be swallowed without critical reflection. This shows that the women have a set of criteria to be considered, and these criteria were surprisingly similar. For example, visibility of the product appeared as a factor, and there was general discontent with the Barbie doll being in focus in this advertisement while other videos (Always and Dove primarily) were credited for not including the product in the video. Furthermore, the history of messages that the company has put out in the past played in. Cecilia noted that 'Barbie has an incredible uphill to climb', and

Viola compared it to Dove who she felt was more serious as they had released multiple videos of this kind, demonstrating a commitment to these issues.

Based on previous knowledge, the women made judgement calls. This shows real contextual thinking, to the point where you are thinking about the time-line of the corporation and your own relationship to their products. There was a perceived disingenuity with Barbie, but more trust in Dove and Always.

However, what makes matters more complex when speaking of feminism undone is the diversity of feminism today. As Gill posits, 'there is no stable, unchanging feminist perspective from which to make a cool appraisal of contemporary gender in the media' (2007b: 2). Interviewing fourteen Swedish women about feminism in advertising certainly supports her point. The short examples above showing how the women extract different meanings from the advertisements illustrate that. Therefore, when applying McRobbie's notion of feminism undone one must recognise its limitation of relying on there being one feminism to be undone.

Stina, 25, pinpoints the complexity of using this theory when discussing 'Like a girl':

I: Is feminism and advertising a combination that works?

R: Like this it does. I think so. But in many cases it doesn't. It still becomes stereotypes.

I know many people who do not want to identify as a woman. How do they fit into this advertisement? Now we could see dark skinned women, but no transgender. Now [Always] takes a stance, does that mean they take an active stance against transgender? Or forgot them? Regardless it becomes excluding.

It depends on which feminism one wants to pair with advertising.

Melanie and Amanda reason in similar ways:

Not everyone is represented, because everyone who is on their period cannot run or hit hard. We live in a society that continues to be very simplistic in its intersectional analysis [...] As an asthmatic I didn't run very fast as a child. There are so many perspectives.

(Melanie, 23, about Always' 'Like a girl')

R: Dove falls on the fact that besides being a multimillion corporation, all women are extremely beautiful. Even if they have different body shapes, the reason that their bodies are accepted is because they are beautiful. Everyone looks very good in that film. It's the same in the Always advertisement.

I: It is still just one type of woman?

R: Yes, exactly. Beauty forgives everything.

(Amanda, 26)

It is clear that when speaking of feminism undone, it depends on who's feminism you refer to, just as Stina suggests. Doing feminism does not mean doing it for everyone. Undoing it does not mean undoing it completely. Therefore these advertisements might be a case of doing feminism for some while undoing it for others.

When spoilt for choice with media content we do have the ability to cherry pick online depending on our own needs and agendas. Within the ambivalence generated by these advertisements hides a set of criteria based on previous knowledge mixed with the emotions and feelings of identification that these videos generate. Corporations can surely capitalise on that, but viewers in turn can use it to their advantage, extracting the meaning they need and use the content to pursue their own goals. Another option, of course, is to opt out and choose not to engage at all.

Conclusion

This thesis has been an attempt to shed light on what it means for the individual person to live in a world where brands are almost everywhere, and where feminist engagement converges with consumption. The aim has been to illuminate how advertising fits into the feminist movement, by asking young Swedish women how they make sense of a number of advertisement videos utilising feminist values and if they might interact with the videos on social media. After interviewing fourteen Swedish women some clear patterns have emerged. In this concluding chapter the main results from this research will be presented in relation to the research questions.

How can we understand the reactions and actions generated by these advertising campaigns?

There was a tendency in the interviews to speak about these videos as resources, as a political tool used to both strengthen like-minded people but also to recruit and invite more people into feminism and into a critical awareness of gender inequality. It is highly plausible that this tendency was strengthened by the fact that much of the conversation centred around sharing the content on social media platforms, which invited the women to factor in their own audiences online. It is not surprising that one's decision to share content is based at least partly on your belief and hope that someone will be influenced by it. Research even suggests that to persuade and teach others are two of the main reasons to share content online (Berger, 2014).

Still, it was evident that the main focus for these women was the empowerment of others, as well as the inclusion of others. The empowerment of oneself had to make way for that, and it was common that the women reasoned that while the videos might be eye-openers for others, they already had their eyes opened themselves. Another layer of empowerment emerged however, when the women discussed the sharing of these videos. It seems the possibility to share the material and use it for your own purpose can provide an empowered ability to perform political action online, and in doing so strengthening the feminist movement.

This is interesting, as much of the existing literature within this area criticises these campaigns for being too focused on individual pursuits. In contrast to that, emerging from these interviews was a clear concern for the collective. This supports Budgeon's idea of young feminists performing a kind of micro-politics in their everyday life (2001), struggling for feminism on individual terms but with the collective at heart. While this thesis sought to explore these women's own reactions to these videos, the conversations often ended up involving other parties too.

All women expressed hope and resourcefulness when discussing these videos, seeing them as carriers of a lightly packaged feminism that could be easily absorbed by almost everyone. The videos were often contrasted with heavy books, academic conversations and difficult political reasoning. Even Amanda, the most sceptical woman, saw possibilities and found ways of working through and dealing with the existence of these campaigns, even though she was adamant that some people would still enjoy reading a doctoral thesis on the subject and that feminism must not be simplified to enjoy success. Nevertheless, it was evident that the

majority saw merit in feminism existing in varying formats. As Alice put it: 'Everyone has the right to their process and you must respect that [...] When you make it so easily accessible everyone has a chance to keep up.' This type of reasoning was common, and statements like this shows a great concern for others.

However, the women also expressed sceptical, often ambivalent and even cynical reactions towards this marketing trend, often referring to advertising as not only a pervasive genre aimed to push us into consumption, but also as a reinforcer of negative stereotypes and body ideals. As has been argued, these reactions seem to stem from an intuitive idea of what advertising is and what it stands for. It is hardly a coincidence that advertising is so often analysed from a gender perspective and viewed as the most disturbing cultural product by many feminist writers (Van Zoonen, 1994). We are fostered into a critical understanding of advertising since we know that what it seeks is to make us buy products and services often expendable, and that while corporations may claim to want to improve the world, in a capitalist world: money trumps everything. All women showed an awareness of this.

However, the reactions and actions were underpinned by an optimistic hope, both with regards to the corporations' aim but also how they might influence audiences. It did not escape anyone that the main aim is to increase revenue, but the women expressed hope that this trend could lead to real change. That hope indicates two things: that these women have a vision for the future, and that they are discontent with the present. It is in this dialectic between a cynical view on advertising and a hope for a gender equal future that these women construct their understanding of this phenomenon.

Politics is not possible without hope, since it is the hope for change that makes us come together and act (Ahmed, 2014:184). Even if all women defined their feminisms somewhat differently they share a concern with the future, fearing that equality will not be reached yet hoping it will. Perhaps the hope displayed in these interviews is not a chosen attitude, but a mere necessity. Without it, the feminist future strived for would become impossible.

This hope, however, could also signify a sense of powerlessness. Corporations are using feminism to sell, and who are women to say they cannot? If there is money to be made it will be used, and as an individual there is little one can do to stop it. All one can do is hope that it will not bring anything bad with it.

Along with the hope came a pragmatic resourcefulness. It is possible that this connects to the fear detected in many interviews that good messages online drown in the media buzz and that it is hard to penetrate an arena where people share

memes and videos at a rate which becomes annoying. Concision is a key word here, to be able to quickly get across a message in a world where both content and ideas are fighting for our attention, according to the logic of mediatisation. Concision seems to be the strength of these advertisements, and a reason many women were eager to pass them on in their network. The better packaged the message is, the more credible and powerful the sender is, the higher the chances that people will actually click on the link. In a way, one could argue, ideologies too fight for our attention in this constant buzz and need to be sold to us in a convincing way. This could be a reason that advertising is considered a powerful resource, as it is a genre mastering the art of conciseness.

How can we better understand the relationship between feminism and advertising through the eyes of the individual feminist?

A columnist in the British newspaper *The Guardian* recently wrote that the current focus on female self-empowerment and the individual focus it brings will lead to 'a great big pile of nothing' and that the term itself has become disempowered (Freeman, 2016). I consider this view, which is echoed in much of the literature, an elitist and reductionist approach to this phenomenon. While we may think it is silly to suggest that women will be empowered by washing their hair with a certain brand of shampoo or playing with a Barbie doll, we should not reduce this phenomena to the use of the word empowerment but rather explore how this marketing strategy fits into the lives of women and how they extract usage from it.

While there were significant similarities between the women's reactions to femvertising, it was evident that each woman contextualised the advertisements differently, judging them based on previous experiences of advertising and how the video fit into one's own life situation. The women extracted various meanings from the content, which speaks against any attempts to generalise female audiences engaging with these campaigns. When both media content and the human mind are complex, generalisations will fail.

The example of Barbie highlighted the women's contextual thinking, showing that while the message itself often trumped the sender, this did not come without limitations. It might feel okay to pass on a message for a brand, but not just any brand. The videos were judged based on the women's previous experience of both brand, product and advertising in general, making the reading of these commodified feminist texts highly individual.

It may seem fruitless and unsatisfying to land in the conclusion that ‘every woman makes of these advertisements what she wants and needs’ and thus take polysemic readings to an extreme. Crediting every viewer with the ability to deduce positive feelings from advertising, more or less regardless of the content, is a slippery slope. Clearly, media and advertising do influence us, or else we would not care to analyse audience responses to it. However, feminism is just as individual as it is collective and it is only when we allow every woman to contextualise these videos for herself in a way that makes sense for her, that we can analyse their potential, meaning and place in our lives in a fair way.

A movement lives through people, and people find strength in various ways. A collective movement, after all, is nothing but a group of like-minded individuals. Irish writer Oscar Wilde once wrote that ‘individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. There lies its immense value. For what it seeks is to disturb monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine’ (1891). The value of femvertising can only be reasonably judged when starting from every woman's experience, which is what I have attempted to do here. Still, among the fourteen women were many commonalities binding their responses together, critical reflection and individual contextualisation being the two main examples of this.

How much value can we place on the idea that femvertising is undoing feminism?

I consider the value of this stance to be limited, simply because it rests on generalisations which I would claim are not possible to make here. When respecting each woman's individual feminism and her contextualisation of the content it becomes too easy to claim that the entirety of feminism becomes undone when feminism is used in this way. However, the theory still has value, albeit constrained, as some women were clearly uncomfortable with certain videos, feeling they rather strengthened than combated anti-feminist values. Thus, the theory should not be used in a sweeping way with regards to media's use of feminism in general, but rather only for certain specific situations. While one woman could consider a video an undoing of feminism, her friend could place an entirely different value on it.

A fair question to ask, however, is to what extent feminism will have to be changed in order to fit into the format of advertising, and what this compromise will lead to. A compromise, after all, assumes cost. As Julia pointed out in my interview

with her, women *die* due to unfair gender structures and so feminism is not ‘a fun club or some fun trend’ up for grabs for anyone who wants to sell more tampons. Will feminism benefit from being mainstreamed? Will it enjoy greater advancements in the world if it becomes more like a ‘fun club’ easy to require membership for?

Is this a win-win situation where both advertising and feminism walk away with advances made, or will one rise above the other? It sparks the question whether advertising will have the power to determine the fall of feminism, by contributing to its success in reaching the masses and therefore also being capable of contributing to make it run out of fashion.

We would need to look long-term to see if this use of feminism rebalances the ideology itself. Here, I will have to settle with channelling the optimistic hope detected when questioning these women on the matter. Interpreting their reactions to these advertisements, one would be selling feminism short if assuming it could be ‘destroyed’ or become undone by advertising.

What can this marketing trend, and the reactions it generates, tell us about contemporary feminism?

The pragmatic, resourceful and hopeful view on feminist advertising that emerged in these interviews says a lot about this generation of Swedish feminists. Sweden is a country often praised for its gender equality, leading the charts as one of the most equal countries in the world (World Economic Forum, 2015). The groundwork has been laid, there is little left to change legislatively and on paper women and men have the same opportunities. Still, inequality resides here just as everywhere else in the world. This status quo, seemingly so difficult to dislodge, might make feminists turn to other options and more willing to explore new paths. It hints at a fatigue of sorts, a tiredness of trying to move forward but feeling like merely running on the spot. A type of asymptotic progress.

Third-wave feminist Jennifer Baumgardner argues that most of the feminist struggle today is fought on personal frontiers (Love and Helmbrecht, 2007: 45). I do agree with her. We are not on the barricades like our mothers were during the second wave. In fact, I would argue that those barricades do not exist anymore. In my own feminist struggle I often find myself running on the spot, trying to fight for change but rarely seeing concrete results. I have tried to convince so many to join me, to see what I see, understand what I understand, and failed. I felt this feeling was echoed in these interviews, and this status quo requires hope,

resourcefulness and openness to new avenues. In Sweden we are no longer fighting to change laws, but mind-sets. And that requires a whole other arsenal of tools.

While the use of this marketing strategy suggests feminism is deemed important, exciting and meaningful enough to use, the reactions towards it demonstrates a hunger among feminists for more tools to use, which in turn suggest advances towards equality are not made fast enough.

I do not wish to idolise these advertisements. It is important to stress that while these videos might invite a kind of feminist engagement, it is an engagement orchestrated by a corporation aimed to strengthen a brand. This marketing trend captures the current feminist Zeitgeist, and while feminists might use the trend for their own purposes and agendas, they are in turn being used as marketing tools by mixing their feminist activism online with brand support.

Bringing in the fourth wave of feminism

The current feminism, increasingly present online, is sometimes referred to as the fourth wave of feminism (Cochrane, 2013). Women all over the world are using social media to shed light on the oppression of women and on gender inequality. Popular feminism lives not only in drama series and advertisements, but in hashtags, blogs, Facebook groups and events, and through celebrities' online social media profiles (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016). Through social media, women combat sexism (#EverydaySexism), misogyny in the gamer community (#GamerGate) and injustices in salary (#LetsDoMore). They urge men to get involved in the feminist struggle (#HeForShe), nuance the image of domestic abuse victims (#WhyIStayed) and criticise sexism in advertisements (#NotBuyingIt).

This online presence of feminism raises questions for the future, particularly when many different stakeholders are involved. Can we fairly label passing on an advertisement as a political action? If the answer is yes, then what kind of societal change can we expect from this micro-politics? Will audiences be influenced towards a feminist engagement or rather immunised towards this type of stimuli? Is this marketing trend merely a fad, with a short lifespan, or will advertisers continue to progress in their use of these values?

What adds to the curiosity of the future from a Swedish perspective is the latest results from the annual Swedish media investigation, Medieutredningen. It shows that 70 % of the Swedish public considers it completely or partly wrong to pass

on advertising through your social network, but that younger generations, and particularly younger females, are far more positive towards it (Bengtsson and Johansson, 2016:196). In line with previous research, this report shows that younger audiences are more positive both towards digital advertising and towards commodification online (ibid:200). Furthermore, The Swedish Institute for Advertising and Media Statistics, IRM, recently stated that investments in social media marketing have never been higher, and that it is increasing at a record speed (Fredén, 2016). Combined with the fact that we spend an increasing amount of our life in the digital world, and that younger generations are leading the charts (Bengtsson and Johansson, 2016), this begs for further research within this area.

According to Korn and Kneese, the current wave of users on online social media sites, combined with the current postfeminist era, means that it is the right time to reflect on how feminists use the online world for the feminist cause (2015), which this thesis has partly done. However, this phenomenon, its influences and the ripple effects it could have deserves further exploration and would benefit from being analysed with a closer attention to the digitalisation of feminism. I would however urge anyone who seeks a better understanding of femvertising to be careful with condemning it before taking into account the heterogeneity of audiences and respecting the individuality within a political movement.

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Appendix A: Empirical data, Videos

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- Always. (2015). [Video]. 'Always #LikeAGirl – Unstoppable', *YouTube*, 7th of July. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhB3l1gCz2E>
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- NikeWomen. (2015). [Video]. 'Better for it – Inner thoughts', *YouTube*, 12th of April. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzbjEMaDjrk>
- Ram Trucks. (2015). [Video]. 'Ram Trucks | Courage Is Already Inside', *YouTube*, 19th of April. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbHGYYD5MFM>
- Special K Canada. (2015). [Video]. '#Own it – Special K', *YouTube*, 20th of September. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAVFCH9x7Og>
- SpecialKUS. (2013). [Video]. 'Special K * More Than a Number', *YouTube*, 21st of August. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQOpjnEG4GY>
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Appendix B: Empirical data, Interviews

- “Alexandra”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 26th of February.
- “Alice”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 1st of March.
- “Amanda”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 2nd of March.
- “Anita”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 25th of February.
- “Ann”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 23rd of February.
- “Cecilia”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 7th of March.
- “Maja”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 29th of February.
- “Maria”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 3rd of March.
- “Julia”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 1st of March.
- “Sara”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 2nd of March.

“Melanie”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 7th of March.

“Joanna”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 3rd of March.

“Stina”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 1st of March.

“Viola”. (2016). Interview with L. Jalakas. 25th of February.

Appendix C: Summary of the advertisement videos

Always’ ‘Unstoppable’

Product: Menstruation products

This video is a follow-up to ‘Like a girl’ and is part of Always’ #LikeAGirl campaign. It was released in 2015, and echoes the same themes and format; that girls are told they are less capable and boys and that this must be changed. In the video, several girls are invited into a TV studio to tell how they have been discouraged in different situations but how they still keep pushing, feeling unstoppable (Always, 2015). It has been viewed over 38 million times on YouTube.

Dove’s ‘Speak beautiful’

Product: Personal care products

In this short video, released in 2015, Dove encourages the viewers to make social media ‘a more positive place’. A number of domino tiles with hurtful tweets are shown to illustrate some of the foul language online (Dove US, 2015). The video is part of a larger campaign involving a cooperation between Dove and Twitter, and it won the Femvertising Award 2015 in the category ‘Social impact’ (Monllos, 2015).

Dove’s ‘Legacy’

Product: Personal care products

This video was released in 2014 and tackles the issue of girls’ low self-esteem. A number of mothers are interviewed about which parts of their bodies they are unhappy about and are asked to write these down. When their lists are compared with the lists written by their young daughters, they realise that they have projected their own bad self-esteem on them. The video ends with the words ‘The way a girl feels about her body starts with how you feel about yours. What’s your beauty legacy?’ (Dove US, 2014).

Dove's 'Evolution'

Product: Personal care products

Evolution was released in 2006 and shows, through time-lapse imagery, how a 'normal' woman is photoshopped into looking completely different for a photo shoot. For example, her neck is lengthened, her eyes enlarged and her skin made smooth. It ends with the words 'No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted' (Zephoria, 2006). This advertisement was highly successful, gained millions of views, topped many viral charts online and won several marketing awards, for example two Cannes awards and Board's Magazine's 'Most watched Ad of the year 2006' to name a few (Adage, 2007).

Dressman's 'Underwear for perfect men'

Product: Clothing for men

Dressman echoes the themes of Dove's Real Beauty Campaign in this advertisement from 2015, in which a variety of male models are used; thin, large, young old etc. The song in the background, with lyrics like 'I love you just the way you are' help bring out the message that men do not need to change to be perfect (Dressmann Official, 2015). Dressman claimed to want to shine light on that not only women suffer from trying to live up to unattainable body ideals (Dressman).

HelloFlo's 'The camp gyno'

Product/Service: A box of menstruation products delivered to your home once a month

This advertisement, released in 2013, tells the story of a young girl who is the first to get her period on summer camp. Instead of feeling embarrassed or trying to hide it, she takes great pride in this and refers to herself as 'the camp gyno'. She distributes tampons and gives pep talks around camp, until the other girls discover the services of HelloFlo. She must then come to the disappointing realisation that her powerful days as the camp gynaecologist are over (HelloFlo, 2013). This video has been viewed over 11 million times on Youtube and was an online success. Its follow-up 'First Moon Party' gained even more success and won the Femvertising Award in the category "Humour" in 2015 (Monllos, 2015).

Nike's 'Better for it – inner thoughts'

Product: Sports goods

In this advertisement, released in 2015, the viewer gets to hear the inner dialogue of women as they are attending spinning class, running a marathon and trying out

yoga for the first time. They are all insecure and doubting themselves, but in the end they realise they can do it and they feel eager to keep going (NikeWomen, 2015). The video is part of a series of advertisements, all part of the 'Better for it'-campaign, aimed to inspire women to improve their training results.

Ram Trucks' 'Courage is already inside'

Product: Car/truck

In this advertisement, released in 2015, a number of women are shown performing physically challenging tasks like climbing a mountain and surfing a big wave. The speaker poses the question 'Have you ever thought, 'I could never do that?'' and then assures the viewer that they can break a stereotype because the courage is already inside (Ram Trucks, 2015). The advertisement won the Femvertising Award 2015 in the category 'Inspiration' (Monllos, 2015).

Pantene's 'Not sorry ShineStrong'

Product: Hair care products

This advertisement was released in 2014 and tells women to stop minimising their strength and power by apologising. A number of scenes illustrate how women apologise for interrupting, asking questions, or for handing their child to its father. The viewer is told that instead of apologising, she should shine strong (Best Ads Channel, 2014). After the release of the video, the president of P&G Global Hair Care & Color stated that 'Pantene is committed to helping women across the globe be strong and shine both inside and out' (quoted in Pantene News, 2014), and thus draws a parallel between inner and outer beauty which perfectly fits the product.

Special K's 'More than a number'

Product: Cereal

This video is part of Special K's 'More than a number'-campaign, urging women to adopt a positive attitude towards weight management. In this particular advertisements from 2013, women in a pop-up jeans shop are surprised to see that the sizes on the jeans are not mentioned in numbers but instead in complimentary words. A pair size 10 cannot be found, but instead the women laugh at finding 'Size: Strong' or 'Size: Sassy'. The words at the end encourages the viewers to rethink what defines us and remember that we are so much more than a number (SpecialKUS, 2013).

Special K's 'Own it'

Product: Cereal

In this advertisement from 2015, several women are shown watching themselves in the mirror, looking sad and disappointed. Statistics are presented, such as '97 % of women have an 'I hate my body' moment every single day'. The speaker voice then announces that Special K believes that 100 % of women have the power to change their own perception. The mirror breaks and women are shown feeling confident (Special K Canada, 2015).

All of these videos can be found on YouTube.

Presidents on Twitter

Twitter discourses of African presidents and implications for democracy

Javie Ssozi

From radio addresses to tweeting presidents

The media have always been perceived to be a fundamental connective tissue between elected leaders and their representatives (Gunther and Meghan, 2000:1). Therefore, the use of media among leaders to inform and influence citizens is not a new phenomenon. In fact, this practice can be traced back through history. But, over the years it has taken different forms and has been influenced by changes in the media landscape. For instance, literature on political communication in the U.S. shows that several presidents have used radio to address and educate the public regularly (see Winfield 1990:104), with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt being the greatest radio communicator of all. During his tenure from 1933 to 1945, two major crises (the Great Depression and the Second World War) threatened to cripple economic and political order all around the world. Roosevelt combined his public-speaking skills with broadcast radio ‘to reassure the country and give progress reports, as well as portray an active, caring president’ (Ibid:103).

It is said that although the president regularly gave formal radio addresses, Roosevelt is mostly remembered for his informal radio chats – commonly known as ‘Fireside Chats’. ‘During that crisis year of 1933, Roosevelt gave at least twenty broadcast addresses, but he gave only four fireside chats’ (Ibid:105). He intentionally kept them few because he feared that the audience would lose interest. In these short radio episodes (under 30 minutes each), the president discussed issues in a casual way because he liked to think of them as if his audience

was beside him on a fireside. Although radio traditionally restricts audience participation thereby giving more power to the person behind the microphone to define the political agenda and set terms for debate, the fireside chats have been hailed as a democratic gesture – owing to how much they made the president accessible to ordinary citizens.

Fast forward

The advent of new media tools, which turn the microphone over to the citizens has been perceived as a way to boost political participation in an era when political participation is dwindling (Dahlgren 2013:9-11). Yet, following the ‘Twitter revolutions’ in Egypt and Tunisia, state control and regulation of platforms like Twitter has been tightened, especially in young democracies. Moreover, state control is not the only problem standing in the way of social media. Social media has been observed to widen the digital divide (the gap between information haves and have-nots) due to the fact that access remains low albeit growing. The fact that these platforms give ordinary citizens not just unlimited publishing rights but also access to a global audience is and probably will always be a concern for many young/fragile democracies around the world.

Despite all these challenges, the surprising trend is the growing number of African presidents who actively use social networking websites like Twitter as a tool for political communication. A 2015 study by Twiplomacy shows that about 80% of African Leaders are on Twitter albeit some are not active or well connected to their counterparts. The study further reveals that ‘Africa is home of some of the most conversational leaders on Twitter’ (Twiplomacy, 2015). Rwanda’s Paul Kagame and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya are Africa’s most ‘followed’ and active Presidents on Twitter. Arguably, Twitter has not only become a popular tool among African presidents but also important to their political and personal lives.

It could be easy to attribute this trend to the evolution of democracy – where, in conformity to expectations of the digital era, leaders have to join the ‘people’s media’ and participate in democratic processes through the digital public sphere. And yet others could argue that this trend has nothing to do with democracy at all, it is just about presidents embracing popular culture and trendy performative politics – that by joining Twitter, these presidents are not interested in engaging in democratic deliberations with citizens, rather, their interest is to build their personal biographies and explore opportunities to extend their influence into the digital public sphere. According to Judith Butler, performative politics is the understanding that personal identity is enacted, constantly negotiated and involving attempts to exercise or subvert power. ‘Sometimes a performative

politics seeks to bring a new situation into being, or to mobilize a certain set of effects, and this can happen through language or through other forms of media' (2013: 102).

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the growing trend of African presidents on Twitter signals positive connotations for the nature and quality of African democracy because Twitter is generally perceived to be very participatory. Unlike Roosevelt's fireside chats that were broadcast on a medium that was barely interactive compared to Twitter, social media platforms offer two-way real time interaction between the president and citizens. This in and of itself is seen to make a president on Twitter democratic in participatory theory. If Roosevelt's radio chats were viewed as a democratic gesture, now imagine the aura that a tweeting president commands in contemporary political culture.

Research aim and questions

The main objective of this study is to explore whether the growing number of active African presidents on Twitter should be viewed as a move to rejuvenate democracy or an artifact of performative politics. This study will use a qualitative content analysis to explore Twitter discourses of three East African Presidents – Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda.

The purpose of the study is to understand how and to what extent these presidents use Twitter to engage their citizens in public debates. The study will apply critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an analytic framework to scrutinize how ideologies and social institutions affect the order of political discourse and the nature of democracy as a whole. Using Fairclough's CDA analytic framework, the researcher will not only focus on the discursive practices of the presidents (their everyday use of Twitter) but will also keenly observe and make reference to the discourses surrounding the presidents in order to gain critical insights into the implication of these discourses on democracy.

The following research questions have been formulated to address the main objectives of this study:

- In what ways does the president engage citizens/others in public debate through Twitter?
- How does the participation of the president in political discourses through Twitter boost civic engagement?

- What are the implications of ‘presidents on Twitter’ on democracy and contemporary political discourse in these African countries?

Background

It is especially important to study this trend in the (East) African context because in many countries, democratic theory has been reduced to the practice of multi-party politics and electoral democracy despite the growing concerns that elections are often neither free nor fair. Opinions that oppose the government’s views are increasingly obscured, media restrictions are soaring and access to political spheres is regulated by legal restrictions. However, the exponential growth and expansion of the mobile telecommunication industry and networks over the past decade has given more ordinary Africans an opportunity to access information and participate in political discourses through handheld internet-enabled devices (ITU, 2014). These new virtual spaces have been hailed to create alternative avenues for debate and deliberation in countries where access to the public sphere is believed to be restricted (Dahlgren, 2013:50; Chadwick, 2006).

A further reason why this study is significant is based on Peter Dahlgren’s observation that democracy is facing a magnitude of dilemmas (2013:9). The underscoring of all these dilemmas, he says, is the ‘problem of citizens’ participation’ (11). For instance, it has become common knowledge all over the world that people’s participation and interest in political processes such as voting and debates is steadily diminishing. According to Dahlgren, the level of disengagement among young people is particularly alarming. Without people’s participation, democratic systems linger at crossroads. Therefore, it can be argued that the presence of presidents on Twitter gives citizens a chance to engage them in political debate at a personal level, albeit presidents have to equally be ready to initiate and participate in debates initiated by citizen on Twitter.

It is also important to note that in countries like Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda where the presidents are active on Twitter, other public institutions have followed suit and continue to engage citizens on service delivery issues. For example, in Uganda, the Uganda Police, Uganda Communications Commission, Uganda Revenue Authority, Uganda National Roads Authority, the Prime Minister and Kampala City Council Authority are among the most active government institutions or representatives on Twitter. If these public institutions are emulating the president, then we need to be more critical about the president’s

use of Twitter to ensure that issues of political power do not deter the anticipation of engaging citizens in public debate.

This study will illuminate how different dimensions of power such as social, political and communicative (discursive) power affect participation in contemporary political discourse on Twitter. The analytical part of this thesis will map the link between discourse and power through underscoring the broader social institutions and ideologies that (re)produce and enforce elements of domination, persuasion and control.

Situating and contextualizing the study

This chapter will explore the theoretical concepts of democracy and participation in the (digital) public sphere chosen for this study, and discuss some of the main approaches to analyzing them. The chapter is divided into three parts. First, the section ‘revisiting democracy’ draws upon David Held’s *Models of Democracy* in order to provide an overview of the concept. This part also takes stock of Dahlgren’s and Held’s observations on the dilemmas of democracy in the late modern era. Secondly, ‘theorizing the politics of participatory democracy’, elaborates on the pervasive nature of political participation by drawing on Sonia Livingstone’s work on the participation paradigm and Nico Carpentier’s distinction between minimalist vs. maximalist participation to show why the ‘political nature of participation’ has been under theorized. Finally, the third part is an attempt to situate digital culture in contemporary political spheres, through the discussion of the role of digital media and culture in orchestrating political debates in mediated environments.

Revisiting democracy: Towards participatory politics

In his book *Models of Democracy*, David Held (1988) explicitly clarifies the importance of democracy in human affairs. Held scrutinizes several ‘models of democracy’ ranging from ‘classical democracy’ in the ancient Greece to present models that are more deliberative and cosmopolitan in nature. These models show that there are several ways of doing democracy; that the understanding of democracy keeps changing and that the media can influence the democratization process. For instance, in the mid-1930s President Roosevelt’s use of radio to engage citizens was in those days perceived as democratic yet, radio was not

interactive in those days. Today, we see a growing trend of presidents on Twitter. Should the fact that a president keeps up with media trends be viewed as a way of renewing democracy? It is important to note that the notion of democracy is therefore highly contested among theorists (See e.g. Chantal Mouffe 2009), although there is consensus that democracy in the broad sense is about people and participation (Dahlgren, 2013).

In the subsequent editions (1996 and 2006) of *Models of Democracy*, Held has revisited and refined the models to expand on the historical perspective surrounding the classical models and most importantly to situate the recent political innovations that have changed, and continue to shape the understanding of democracy in the postmodern era. In the third edition, Held asserts that 'deliberative democracy' should be added to the list of 8 models of democracy he identified in the past (2006: 231). He argues that deliberative democracy has been presented as a way to improve the quality of democracy.

Deliberative democracy, Bernard Manin argues, should be viewed as a learning process, enabling people to make reasonable political judgment based on their understanding of issues (in Held, 2006: 233). And this, Manin argues, constitutes the legitimacy of democracy. This view breaks down the understanding of deliberation to a personal level and turns the focus to how individuals access and process information that is vital for them to meaningfully participate in public debates. Another takeaway point from Manin's argument is that public opinion and its formation is a process not an end. Today, media platforms like Twitter play an indispensable role in enabling, motivating and even discouraging participation in contemporary political debates. The fact that top government officials use Twitter (regardless of their personal reasons for joining such platforms) creates the impression that they are making themselves available to their constituents to engage in debate and deliberate on critical issues. Therefore, if the president uses Twitter to engage citizens in public debate and if so, in what ways is important to this study.

Dahlgren is cognizant that 'the political emerges through talk or other forms of communication [...] and to a large extent discourses in the modern world circulate through the media' (2013: 19). Moreover, in his book *Media and Political Engagement*, Dahlgren critically examines deliberative democracy, anchoring his argument on the issue of power. The study by Twiplomacy reveals an interesting trend but perhaps it is quite ambitious to perceive African presidents on Twitter as conversational. This is because, social media analytics only tells part of a very complex story. The figures and numbers provided to support social media analytics narratives give some statistical insights but they are not enough to

make sense of online discourses. To grasp these discourses one requires more than figures and numbers – since the numbers do not tell who is excluded, let alone the various levels of control and influence that embody participation in contemporary online discourses.

In Dahlgren's view, we ought to be aware of the limitation to deliberation lest we overload our expectations of deliberation in the public sphere (2009: 92). Dahlgren notes three limitations namely; the challenge of defining what counts as political deliberation, excessive rationality, and the problem of power. He notes two dimensions of power - discursive and social, both of which form preconditions for deliberation and its limits in the public sphere. For instance, communication competencies and social status vary across citizens and this can delimit political participation. Communicative competencies as a form of power - promoting or hindering a robust democracy - will be theorized further in the following sub-sections of this chapter.

Dahlgren notes that there is a growing awareness of and commitment to democracy all around the world. He adds that many countries that 'previously had authoritarian regimes' (2013: 10) have embraced certain aspects of democracy. 'In other parts of the world struggles are raging in an effort to establish something that might be called democracy' (Ibid:10), he adds. Dahlgren's argument could be interpreted to say that democracy is not one solid clearly-defined block; rather, it is a lego of interlocking blocks. For example, elements such as participation, accountability and power sharing or representation can be viewed as blocks or signifiers of democracy. Now, it is still important to note that the question of how to measure democracy remains unanswered and often contentious. However, if we take the view that democracy can be embedded in different aspects of governance then we can rank how democratic a country is based on what its mode of governance offers to citizens. In the same way we can tell which countries are lesser of democracies. On the African continent, many countries that claim to be democracies have been placed under the microscope. Studies show that to some of these Africa countries (including Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda) democracy is an umbrella term used to echo the practice of multi-party systems and electoral processes, regardless of whether elections are free and fair or not.

Whether democracy is measurable in a nuanced way or not, using Held's models of democracy, one should be able to score democracy against what the model claims to offer. For example, the deliberative and participatory models of democracy suggest that citizens should be directly involved in decision-making processes on public affairs (Held, 2006). Therefore, the only way to test the

presence, absence or even depth of deliberative or participatory democracy is through analyzing the mechanisms that enable citizen engagement and participation in public debate, albeit we must also be critical of the amount of participation such mechanisms offer (as we will see later on in this chapter). This explains why the deficit of people's participation in contemporary politics signals ideological dilemmas for democracy.

In his account on *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, Matthew Hindman notes, 'It may be comforting to believe that the Internet is making [...] politics more democratic. In a few important ways, though, beliefs that the Internet is democratizing politics are simply wrong' (2009:3). He acknowledges that even though the impact of the Internet seems obvious, it might tempt us to draw wrong conclusions (Ibid:4). He proposes that we need to be keen on the factors that shape online politics in order to understand 'the fate of politics in the Internet age'. For instance, he takes note of how the Internet has fuelled the creation of new political elites. Dahlgren (2013) takes note of this same issue although he uses the term 'public intellectuals'. Dahlgren also agrees that online public intellectuals signal significant challenges for democracy, albeit their contribution to the functioning of democracy is traditionally indispensable (Ibid). For Carpentier the real problem with political elites has more to do with what he calls the 'privileged access of some voices' (2011:147), which in some scenarios leads to lack of access for others. He however acknowledges that new and alternative media channels have tried to mitigate the impact of these discursive limitations.

This research will scrutinize the political discourses of the three presidents on Twitter in an attempt to understand the implication of having 'presidents on Twitter' on democracy.

Theorizing the politics of participatory democracy

Many political scholars have used the concept of participation as a yardstick for democracy (Dahlgren, 2009). In democratic theory, participation has been explored from many angles; first, placing an inquiry on what participation really entails, whether people (are allowed to) openly participate in decision-making processes ranging from voting their representatives to contributing to policy making and whether people are empowered to meaningfully participate in such processes or not. Moreover, Carpentier (2011) argues:

the right to participate [...] should not be transformed into an obligation [...] Participation should remain an invitation – permanently on offer and embedded in balanced power relations – to those who want to have their voices heard (2011: 359).

Researchers have also explicitly explored the social, political and economic structures in an effort to understand ‘what factors enable or hinder participation’? In fact, many political theorists are quite alarmed by the increasingly diminishing level of participation in political life (Dahlgren, 2009: 1). Moreover, it is arguably undeniable to say that the world has become more democratic and tempting to attribute most of the developments in the democratization arena to participation.

Contemporary politics is increasingly shaped and defined by participation and participants. In over 60% of the countries in the world, citizens directly elect their heads of state and about 80% of all countries directly elect their members of parliament (Freedom House, 2015). Many of these countries conduct general elections regularly and except for a few outliers, all citizens including women have the ‘right to vote’ (Ibid). In Rwanda, for instance, the government put the highly contested issue of presidential term limits to a referendum in December 2015. 98% of the people voted yes in favour of lifting term limits. Between 2011 and 2013, Kenya’s ministry of finance used Twitter to crowdsource ideas for the national budget. Whether the results of these processes demonstrated the will of the people remains disputed but what is certainly clear is that these are remarkable milestones in contemporary African politics.

Beyond electoral democracy, digital technologies offer almost limitless (new) avenues for political participation, engagement and interaction. Some theorists and tech enthusiasts have even starkly juxtaposed the letter ‘e’ with democracy, participation and governance to emphasize the arrival of electronic democracy, participation and governance (Chadwick, 2006: 84; van Dijk, 2012). E-democracy (lately synonymous to digital democracy) is derived from the view that information and communication technologies enable citizens to actively participate in political spheres and decision-making processes hence giving democracy a boost. Moreover, as the media environment continues to evolve, we have to be more critical about traits we consider democratic, including participatory processes. For instance, should we assume that the presence of a president on Twitter signals democracy simply because he tweets about issues that are socially and politically relevant to citizens, and the citizens respond? The political scientist Sidney Verba points out the existence of ‘pseudo-participation’ the aim of which is to show that participation is viable instead of actually

increasing participation (in Carpentier, 2011:126). Therefore, it would be a bit naïve to assume the usually taken-for-granted position that ‘if they are tweeting, they are participating’.

Carpentier (2011:14) argues that in the field of media and communication studies participation remains ‘under theorized’ and its naturally ‘political nature remains unacknowledged’. In fact, he continues, not all participatory processes are participatory – echoing Jan Servaes’ remarks on participatory communication which signals the coexistence of both ‘real’ and ‘fake’ communication. Carpentier’s argument seems to dovetail on the common sentiment that ‘the notion of participation has been used against itself’. In her 2013 article *The Participation Paradigm in Audience Research*, Sonia Livingstone explores ‘the entangled narratives of audiences and audience research’ (2013:21) and the features of the emerging participation paradigm. Livingstone explores and scrutinizes Abercrombie and Longhurst’s (1998) comparison between three participation paradigms namely, (i) the behavioural paradigm, (ii) the incorporation/ resistance paradigm and (iii) the spectator/ performance paradigm (2013:23). In a nutshell, these paradigms relate to media effects and use, audience reception or encoding/decoding as Hall (1980) puts it and the postmodern view that examines people as performers respectively. These paradigms, Livingstone argues, represent a different understanding of power and a contrasting perception of the audience. Livingstone’s argument seems to correspond with Carpentier’s concern that the political nature of participation has been unacknowledged - suggesting that issues of power need to be examined more carefully. Participation, Carpentier (2011) argues, should be seen as an attempt to make the distribution of power in society more equal.

In the field of media and communication, Carpentier asserts that the debate on access, interaction and participation should

focus on the distribution of power within society at both the macro- and micro-level. [...] At the macro-level, they deal with the degree to which people could and should be empowered to (co)decide on political, spatial, developmental, symbolic-cultural and communicative matters. At the micro-level, they deal with the power relations between privileged and non-privileged actors, between politicians [...] on the one hand, and (ordinary) people who do not hold these positions on the other (2011:125).

To understand how democratic participatory democracy is, we must scrutinize the mechanisms that enable participation; what kind of participation is supported

and why, who benefits from them, how and not forgetting who is excluded and why? The presence of a president on Twitter for example allows citizens to engage him/her in debate but who sets the condition for the debate? Similarly, the conditions that promote or deter participation in the public sphere must be scrutinized. The inconveniencing truth, Carpentier (2012) acknowledges, participation in political spheres will always be unequal, problematic, misunderstood and contested. And, following Carpentier's observation that participation is about checking the distribution of power, we need to be aware of who makes the rules or norms that delimit participation. Who creates the structural boundaries? Politics is about power, influence and just like everyday life, politics is (or can be) a performance. Consequently, participation is a performance where people perform different roles as audience or users, citizens or leaders, yet these performances are almost undetectable because they are intrinsically interwoven in our social life. Therefore, we should not take for granted the performative nature and role of individuals in digital spheres.

While it is increasingly difficult to categorize Twitter users as audiences – because users are actively engaged in the conversations, constantly interacting with tweets, negotiating meaning and performing different roles as producers and consumers – it is important to note that not all users participate equally or even for the same reasons. Judging by its character, it is arguable that Twitter affords users who have access to the Internet and the platform equal opportunities as (prod)users and participants. However, from a sociological point of view, these users are individuals with often-uneven social backgrounds (skills, access, power positions) hence uneven power relationships (Olsson and Svensson, 2012: 49). For example, does the fact that a president participates in a Twitter conversation with ordinary citizen afford those citizens equal power? To answer this question with a simple yes or no would not do justice to the facts of the matter. Although it is noteworthy to mention that in both political and social spheres the president will still be considered to be more privileged, influential and powerful in any conversation. The issue of power and empowerment will be vital in assessing the Twitter discourses of the presidents.

Perhaps this is a convenient point to backstop and revisit Livingstone's (2013) question: participation in what? Carpentier uses two interrelated terms to shed light on audience participation, namely participation *in the media* and participation *through the media* (2011:67). He argues that the latter is concerned with 'opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and for self-representation' while the former deals with everyday practices of citizens like production of media content (Ibid:68). Although it is evident that people are

engaging in identity formation, it is important to be open to the idea that the audience/ citizens might as well be ‘participating in something much larger than themselves’ (Dahlgren, 2009) – for instance democracy.

The president tweets and his citizens read the tweet and respond. This sounds like a step in the right direction especially put in the context of a young democracy. It is even arguable that the President is not only making him/herself available to the people but also willing to engage in a dialogue with them. But then the question becomes, how meaningful is such participation, how do we quantify or measure what level of participation is optimal to render their participation meaningful? Paradoxically, an attempt to use positivism to answer these questions will only offer a narrow understanding of a complex issue, which is why this research will combine Carpentier’s dimensions of minimalist and maximalist participation with a critical discourse analysis in an effort to qualitatively answer those questions.

In addition, Carpentier proposes two dimensions to dissect democratic participation and the associated power structures; minimalist and maximalist participation – where the latter is an attempt to maximize participation through balancing representation and participation while the former is concerned with the focus on representation and delegation of power to a selected elite, hence minimizing participation. From this understanding, maximalist models of participation are more ideal and functionally desirable for democracy. Moreover, the notion of participation offers a lot of hope to the evolution of democracy yet it is highly pervasive and contested. Moreover, ‘even the contemporary maximalist participatory models only rarely aim to impose participation’ (Carpentier, 2012:172). This is because as Carpentier observes, ‘the main defining component of participation, namely power, also obscures the more radical (maximalist) versions of participation and hegemonizes the more minimalist forms of participation’ (2015:24). Carpentier also shows how participation *in* and *through* the media translates into minimalist or maximalist modes of participation. He concurs that social media have been ‘more successful at organizing more intense forms of participation in the media’ (2011:68). Therefore, he is aware that social media has the potential to contribute to maximalist forms that acknowledge audience diversity and heterogeneity, which is essential to this thesis.

In the social sciences, the issue of power is known as a delimiting factor in establishment of relations. In the field of media and communication studies, the problem of power has been theorized from different angles. Castells (2009:3) posits that ‘power relies on control of communication’ where as counter power is about resisting and breaking such control. He observes that communication that

reaches society 'is shaped and managed by power structures'. In his view, the ability to exercise coercion is a source of power. However, the ability to build consent remains indispensable in governing society. Therefore, participation can also be seen as a process that embodies many hidden agendas ranging from coercion to deliberative process whose aim is to build consent – where building consensus could discredit the democratic claims especially when manipulation is involved. Building on these arguments, it is important to note that participation in and through digital media is not immune to power (both macro and micro-power), which might seek to control, coerce and build consent. Again, this is why this study will employ a framework of critical discourse analysis in an attempt to gain a deeper insight into the ideological and institutional structures that influence power relations in contemporary society. This research will also attempt to establish whether the agenda of a president on Twitter is to understand how presidents use their communicative abilities to control, coerce or build consent.

Contemporary African political discourse in the digital public sphere

For the greater part of the mid 1990s through 2008, research on information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the African continent focused broadly on the role of ICTs in development. The focus was mostly on technology as a driving force for social change and development (Smith and Marx, 1994) paying very little or no attention to human agency and other social determinants as Grint and Woolgar (1997) noted. Many researchers and development practitioners highlighted the impact of the digital divide on access to information and development (Cullen 2003; Servon 2002) - arguing that due to inadequate and unlevelled access to information and technology, the African continent had been excluded from the 'information revolution' (Mudhai et al., 2009). Indeed, this was true as Castells (1998/2010) observed that there were more telephone lines in Manhattan or Tokyo than the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Recent research has indicated that mobile phone penetration has been growing at a very fast rate including in the rural and poorest parts of Africa (ITU, 2015). In fact, many Africans also use their handheld devices to connect to the Internet. This sudden and exponential demand for mobile phones and the Internet has been viewed as a turning point, enabling more Africans to join the global information society. Connected Africans make a sizable contribution to social, political and cultural conversations - both within their countries and at global level - through the World Wide Web (Portland Communications, 2015). Now that more of the world's poorest and least tech-saturated economies are joining

global conversations, the prospect of a 'global village' (Habermas, 1998:120-121) sounds more realistic. And despite known limitations such as skills and cost that restrict access to ICTs, there is evidence that the African digital culture is growing and it is quite vibrant in all spheres of life.

As digital technologies continue to transverse all aspects of contemporary life, everyday practices are becoming digitized. Citizens are adopting new tools to enable them exercise their rights; to access information at their convenience and to perform their civic duties - producing and reproducing their social, cultural and political spheres of life. As Africa's digital cultures harness digital media tools, Dahlgren (2009) notes that the significance of media tools in everyday life is no longer questionable. Digital cultures are cultures that have emerged out of the growing consumption and use of digital technologies in contemporary society. Hence, researchers can no longer ignore the capability of an African with an Internet enabled handset.

Moreover, to gain a textured understanding of the role of digital media in African politics we must be very critical of not just the technological determinants or capabilities of tools like Twitter but also social determinants (Ling 2004:23). Social determinists argue that social and political factors should be of primary significance in understanding the relationship between society and media technologies (Casmir, 2013:89-90). For instance, to argue that Twitter is a powerful political communication tool is true, yet that level of power will vary depending on who is using it, where, why and for what reasons.

In his account of building communication theories, Fred Casmir notes that instead of focusing on the autonomous influence of digital technologies such as Twitter, researchers must be observant of social and political factors that shape or determine access, people's values, their skills, how they use and levels of control among others. The study on *How Africa Tweets* presents interesting hints on what topics people tweet about in different African countries (Portland Communications, 2015). Yet, like many other analytics reports, it takes a very positivist approach paying very little or no attention to the social, political and historical settings in which these discourses are constructed and enacted. Therefore, we must understand the social forces that determine what people do, when, how and why they do it in order to understand Africa's digital culture. This research will draw on a social determinist approach to explore conditions that shape the use of digital media in contemporary politics.

For instance, the wave of protests and revolutions that swept through North Africa, starting from Tunisia in December 2010 completely changed the role of

digital media in political engagement, mobilizing masses and orchestrating revolutions on the African continent (Castells, 2012). Castells concludes that regardless of whether these revolutions gave power to the people or not, these events have heightened the optimism and scepticism over what people can do with digital platforms to avert power structures. These events have pushed the limits of participation in the media beyond what is normally considered 'slacktivism' or even minimalist, presenting new hope and even evidence that digital platforms can indeed make participation more democratic. Yet, using a social determinist approach, we would be foolish to look at the outcomes of these revolutions without carefully considering the specific circumstances and contexts, which shaped them and the outcomes.

Over the decades, there has been a proliferation of research, academic articles, books and debates attempting to situate the ever-shifting media terrain in a turbulent political environment. The shift in the media terrain has been thoroughly scrutinized, clearly underscoring the key turning points - from the making of traditional mass media to the invention of the internet, benchmarking key achievements in public broadcast and programing, the advent of groundbreaking 'new media' and the blurring of lines between the traditional and the new (mass) media. As Dahlgren (2009) notes, there are a number of developments that are relevant in understanding the role of the media in democracy. He points out proliferation which is a deluge of options available to consumers or users, concentration of ownership among massive empires, (de)regulation of the media through policy processes, globalization of culture and the digitization trend. All these issues, Dahlgren posits, have serious consequences in the evolution of democracy. Moreover, there is consensus among political theorists and, media and communication scholars that the media are prerequisites in shaping a democratic society (Curran, 2010; Dahlgren, 2009, 2013; O'Reilly, 2005).

The media (both traditional and digital) have been hailed for their role in informing citizens and creating spaces for citizens to participate in 'democratic' processes (Bell, 2001:7). The developments in the media industry have affected the way society goes about almost everything - from social interaction to participation in politics (Becker 1998; Castells 2007; Dahlgren, 2009; van Dijk, 2013 and 2006). Moreover, political theory scholars have also continuously demonstrated the changes, improvements and setbacks in the understanding of democracy over the years. But the role of the media in promoting or hindering the promise of a democratic society in an increasingly mediated society remains by and large a contested topic among the scholarship and it will be crucial to this

thesis' inquiry. For instance, a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW 2016) shows that in Rwanda, 'tight restrictions on freedom of speech and political space remained in place'. In the new Rwanda, freedom of speech and media freedom have been curtailed allegedly for 'public good' and yet, the Rwandan president continues to be praised by both local and international media for his seemingly democratic gesture of being an active president on Twitter.

In their study on Australian politicians' use of the social network tool Twitter, Grant et al. noted that the 'emergence of online social media has had a significant effect on the contemporary political landscape' (2010:579). Digital media have become a popular research topic among media and communication scholars over the past two decades. There is a rich literature documenting achievements/failures, making recommendations and prophesizing on how digital media platforms have been, can and could be used to affect political engagement and the evolution of democracy in contemporary society (Bryan et al. 1999, Castells, 2007; van Dijk, 2000a).

In their study *National Politics on Twitter*, Ausserhofer and Maireder (2013) explored the structure of the 'networked public sphere' and the topics politicians, journalists, citizens and political strategists discuss on Twitter. They found that Twitter was more effective for people who already had established social/ online networks, yet overall they agree that:

Twitter facilitates links between the political centre and the citizenry, giving 'ordinary' citizens more chances to engage in the political discourse. Whether citizens feel they are more involved in politics and how this engagement affects the political [...] is still an open question (2013:310).

Much of the interest in digital media as a platform for political engagement builds on Jurgen Habermas' (1989) work on the 'public sphere' and extends this to include notions of 'digital public spheres'. According to Habermas, the public sphere is an arena where civil society can openly discuss issues of importance to cause political action. He advocates for a liberal public sphere that guarantees equal access for all. Habermas' vision of a vibrant public sphere views communication and deliberation as key components for equal access. Indeed, the wealth of political discourse going on with the presidents on Twitter invites us to consider that Twitter is an integral part of the public sphere. In this digital sphere, we see discussions, opinions and debates taking shape, amidst struggle for hegemony and control (Fairclough, 2008: 2).

Moreover, as we have seen above, Castells' notion of communicative power and Dahlgren's observation of issues such as social and discursive power clearly spell out the danger of assuming that the public sphere guarantees access for all. Access and use of the public sphere remains restricted and contested. While the notion of the public sphere vividly draws attention to the concept of 'the public', it also makes us aware of that which is not public - in other words 'the private'. Hannah Arendt (2007) uses knowledge from ancient Greece to elaborate on the difference between the public and the private suggesting that the character of the public is social; it is about making issues public whereas the private is characterized by intimacy and the hidden realities. Moreover, Arendt asserts that in contemporary society the private and the public are intertwined. The fact that the two are intertwined is more visible in digital public spheres but the challenge remains how to deal with the antagonism resulting from the magnitude of private issues in conflict with public issues.

Even though Habermas did not necessarily imply a public sphere in a digital perspective, his school of thought has inspired additions (to his original idea) that transcend a physical space, to include the pervasive virtual online world. Today, digital platforms like Twitter are proudly viewed and addressed as an integral part of the public sphere. And despite its known technical limitations, such as the 140 character posts, Twitter has positioned itself as an indispensable tool in the sphere of political deliberation. It is in this sphere that 'the political' emerges. There are varying definitions of the 'the political' but perhaps a hybrid of Hannah Arendt and Chantal Mouffe's definition can offer a fair understanding of this notion. According to the duo, the political is a space of freedom and power, public deliberation and conflict, a dimension of antagonism and a force that organizes human societies.

A reflection on data collection, organization and analysis

This section is divided into two parts. The first part describes methods for data collection (a qualitative content analysis) and the second contains a discussion of the methodology for data analysis (critical discourse analysis).

Data collection and organization

Qualitative content analysis

This study will employ content analysis for data collection and organization.

Content analysis is indigenous to communication research and is potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences. It seeks to analyse data within a specific context in view of the meanings someone - a group or a culture - attributes to them (Krippendorff, 1989:403).

Krippendorff proposes a six step procedure technique to content analysis which includes design, unitizing, sampling, coding, drawing inferences and validation (1989: 406-7). These procedures and how they were used will be briefly described here:

The conceptual phase of this study followed Krippendorff's technique to design the research. During this phase, the researcher (or analysts) defines the context 'what they wish to know and are unable to observe directly' (Ibid:406), and explores the data source. A key task at this stage is not only to outline the context and explore the data but also to adopt an analytical framework to map out the relationship between the data and the context. The corpus of this study is tweets of three African presidents. The three African presidents are Paul Kagame of Rwandan, Kaguta Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya. All tweets and replies from when the president joined Twitter until 23rd, February 2016, a total of 6,876 tweets were studied and analysed. The table below shows the number of tweets analysed for each president.

Table 1:

Number of tweets analysed and specific period of time.

PRESIDENT'S NAME	REPORT PERIOD	TWEETS ANALYSED
Kagame	May 15, 2009 – Feb 23, 2016	2553
Museveni	April 24, 2014 – Feb 23, 2016	1339
Kenyatta	Dec 11, 2010 – Feb 23, 2016	2984

Since specific research questions had already been designed for this study, the researcher decided to adopt the qualitative approach to content analysis as the specific method of choice. Qualitative content Analysis (QCA) is concerned with textual analysis – classifying large texts into a manageable number of categories or themes (Weber, 1990).

The three research questions stated in the introductory chapter of this paper were formulated during the design phase. The questions are listed below:

- In what ways does the president engage citizens/others in public debate through Twitter?
- How does the participation of the president in political discourses through Twitter boost civic engagement?
- What are the implications of having ‘presidents on Twitter’ for democracy and contemporary political discourse in these African countries?

The researcher explored the tweets, paying specific attention to what the presidents are tweeting about, who they interact with, how others interact with them and the specific context surrounding each of the discourses. This was an important step for the researcher because Twitter conversations are usually made up of short correspondences/tweets (140 characters) and making sense out of them requires understanding the specific context under which a particular tweet or conversation is made. Background knowledge of contemporary political discourse in the three East African countries and an overview of African democracy was also an important asset to the researcher. Drawing on this knowledge the researcher made an attempt to understand whether the Twitter discourses of the three presidents were related in any way. Indeed, there was a relationship not just in terms of the issues the presidents discuss but also the ideologies, choice of language and tweeting style. The researcher realized that methodologically, critical discourse analysis could deepen the understanding of those discourses and their relationships.

At this stage, the researcher realized that although the original corpus of 6,876 tweets would offer a deep understanding of the practices of the selected African presidents on Twitter and their discourses, this was also a huge volume of data. The researcher decided that using a mix of full tweets, conversation excerpts and short phrases or texts would increase the efficiency of the analysis. According to Krippendorff (1989:406), when choosing units for analysis, the key is to think about what will be a ‘representative sample’ especially if only isolated parts of the data are to be used for analysis instead of the whole volume of data. The researcher believes that the selected samples show a mix of issues, represent all presidents and also show views of other people who engage with them through Twitter.

Another critical consideration that the researcher made while selecting units of analysis was to ponder about using quantitative units such as number of replies

by the president to others and even number of replies from others to the president. The purpose of this consideration came from the need to measure engagement, which often requires positivistic evidence but also because this is the most popular method used in social media analytics.

According to Krippendorff, sampling is important for two major reasons (i) to ensure that the chosen sampling units are representative of the volume of data and (ii) to undo the statistical biases. Another important note here is that sampling is also a very useful technique when dealing with a huge volume of data, to break it down and make it manageable.

Some of the recommended text-based sampling techniques include random, systematic, relevance, cluster and stratified among others (Krippendorff, 2004: 120). Based on the sampling units identified in the step above (full tweets, conversation excerpts and short phrases), several techniques were adopted. Cluster sampling was adopted for conversation excerpts. However, due to the volume of the conversations the researcher had to further use relevance sampling to determine which parts of the conversation are more relevant to the conversation. Random sampling was also useful in this process to increase reliability.

The researcher used coding to classify units of data into selected categories of analytical relevance. Coding relies on evaluation of relevance and meaning to ensure that the results of the process are reliable.

To understand what the president tweets about, two broad categories were identified for the coding process – that is Formal and Informal. Formal was defined as tweets that discuss social, political and economic issues and situations. Informal was defined as tweets that focus on the president's personal interests and fantasies – for example when a President tweets about football, a birthday, Christmas and so on. These categories were chosen because based on them one can easily tell whether the president uses Twitter to discuss politics or not.

When the researcher started coding the data into the two original categories, many of the tweets were found to be no more than "Thank You". Based on the definition of the two categories, thank you tweets would have to end up being informal. Yet the researcher realized that this would not be the most appropriate way to classify them as thank you tweets have two attributes – one which may be informal but the most important one is that they are a form of acknowledgement. Therefore, the researcher decided to create a third category and named it Acknowledgement. Acknowledgement was then defined to represent tweets that fall in the category of 'thank you'.

The researcher used the web version of Twitter (www.twitter.com) to access the tweets of the presidents. All tweets by the presidents were openly available to the general public and all Twitter accounts of these presidents were verified (by Twitter) at the time of the study. Tweets were read, interpreted and filed under the most relevant of the three categories in a three-column Microsoft Word table. For reference purposes, the researcher decided to code the whole tweet including the name of the person who tweeted it, date, time and full contents of the tweet. The researcher also used Twitonomy (www.twitonomy.com), a free Twitter analytics website to simplify the process of scrolling through the Twitter timeline. Later, the researcher learned that Twitter (www.twitter.com/search) offers a very flexible advanced search tool for finding tweets of a particular person over a given period of time and from one Twitter user to another. This tool was particularly useful in contextualizing the discourses and to quickly find Twitter conversations from another user to the president.

Data analysis

Critical discourse analysis

As mentioned earlier, this study will employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for data analysis. The specific approach to CDA used in this study is one proposed by Norman Fairclough and further complemented by scholars such as Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk. Specific components of Michel Foucault's work such as the orders of discourse (1971) have also been used to deepen the analysis. Fairclough's definition of CDA is quoted here at length.

By 'critical' discourse analysis I mean discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (1995:132-3).

This definition was quite useful in reflecting on the Twitter conversations before and during the coding process. Based on this definition, the researcher viewed the tweets not as isolated texts but as discursive practices and events that contain discourses. The researcher was also attentive to the relationships (for instance,

aspects of social interaction and power) that these practices produce and most importantly the relationships between the discourses and the social actors.

Fairclough's approach to CDA combines both the critical commitment – to understand how discursive and linguistic incidents determine people's lives and limit social formations – and the interdisciplinary commitment, which in the social sciences is more or less the paradigm shift towards or away from modernity (quoted in Bell and Garrett 1998: 144).

While Twitter seems to offer all users equal opportunities to participate, the researcher was interested in identifying how discursive practices delimit participation and how through these practices political discourses take shape and order. Therefore, it is important to link discourses to broader ideologies and institutions, and observe how these ideologies and institutions act as vessels for domination, persuasion and control in contemporary society. The issue of power was particularly illuminated throughout the analysis.

Fairclough proposes a three dimensional analytical framework since, as he posits,

each discursive event has three dimensions or facets: it is a spoken or written language *text*, it is an instance of *discourse practice* involving the production and interpretation of text, and it is a piece of *social practice* (emphasis in original 1995: 133).

In his view, a key aspect to be aware of while using this analytical framework is that discourse practices mediate the 'link between texts and society/ culture' (Bell and Garrett 1998:144). Therefore, he adds, the analysis of discourse practices should not only draw upon discursive aspects but also sociocognitive traits of discourse processing. Sociocognitive traits of discourse processing (or intertextuality, in simple terms) basically means that in everyday life, people use a variety of culturally available resources (texts) to produce and interpret texts.

Fairclough's analytic method was especially suitable for this study because it explicitly focuses on uncovering the relationship between texts and society. Through this relationship, we understand how issues of power impact on social interaction in mediated environments. van Dijk asserts, 'it is one of the tasks of CDA to spell out these forms of power.' He further elaborates that 'if discourse is defined in terms of complex communicative actions, access and control may be defined both for the context and for the structures of text and talk themselves' (2008: 90).

A semi-qualitative study

Due to the corpus of this study and the fact that it was conducted on a social media platform, the researcher realized that a semi-qualitative study would be useful in providing insights into the Twitter practices of the presidents. While CDA and the qualitative study provide a critical perspective, the semi-qualitative study attempts to provide some measurable findings. For instance, the semi-qualitative study not only observes who the president replies to, it also attempts to count or measure how often they reply to others and so on. As the researcher believes that these numbers only tell part of a very complex story, providing an overview of this data is imperative to contextualize the analysis.

The researcher used Twitonomy, an online tweet analytics tool to analyse the tweets of the three presidents. Twitonomy was very useful for both data collection and for the semi-qualitative analysis because its platform makes it easy to view at least 20 tweets per page compared to Twitter.com where only 5 to 6 tweets can be viewed per page.

The most significant findings of the semi-qualitative analysis have been summarized under section *Does the president really tweet* and *Connecting through culture* of the analysis and the rest can be found in Appendix B.

The discussion: A critical reflection on discourses

The discussion in this chapter is divided into four parts. The first part starts with the general understanding of conversations (or debates) in the realm of the 'Twittersphere' and zooms in on the specific context of Kenyans, Rwandans and Ugandans on Twitter to answer the question: 'Does the president really tweet?'. The term *Twittersphere* is used here as an umbrella phrase referring to Twitter users and the practices they engage in on and through the Twitter platform. The second part of this chapter takes the position that if the president really tweets, then he/she is potentially participating in something. This part attempts to understand what the president is participating in and how that leads to political engagement. Issues such as self-identity and political performance, popular culture and democracy are discussed in relation to the Twitter discourses of the presidents. The third part builds on Carpenter's dimensions of minimalist and maximalist participation to deepen the understanding of political participation and its limits in the contemporary Twittersphere. The purpose is to understand whether the

participation of the president gives everyday civic engagement through digital media more vigor and significance. The issue of power is illuminated here. The final part of this chapter is a critical reflection on the implications of having a 'president on Twitter' on contemporary politics and political discourse in the (digital) public sphere.

Beyond Broadcast: Conversations in the realm of 'Twittersphere'

To gain a nuanced understanding of the character of online public debate, we must not only consider the interactive character of Twitter, rather, focus on the quality and intensity of the debate it affords. Debate is only sustainable when there are two or more parties contributing to a conversation. Therefore, Twitter can only facilitate a meaningful political debate if users view it as a conversational platform instead of a broadcast tool.

The word conversation is used here to emphasize the importance of two-way communication in contemporary political spheres. Habermas views the public sphere as avenues 'for communicating information and points of view' (1996:360). To view Twitter as a sphere where political debate can take shape takes the premise that users are able to initiate their own conversations through tweeting but should be equally obliged or interested to participate in conversations initiated by other users through replying to their tweets. If these conditions are not fulfilled then Twitter becomes a broadcast tool – where the primary objective of a given user is to tweet and retweet opinions or thoughts that interest him/her with the aim of spreading the message far and wide; paying very little or no attention to replies addressed to them or conversations initiated by other users. Corner (2011: 49-50) and Jenkins et al. (2013) observe that the form of media – referring to the medium, content and its 'spreadability' – constitute unobservable/detectable elements of power

It is worth noting that Twitter supports multiple forms of interaction – with the tweets and among users – for instance tweet, retweet, reply, favourite, message and follow. While all these forms of interaction are important in initiating, sustaining and amplifying the mood of an online debate, not all modes of interaction are conversational. For example, when a user favourites or retweets another user's tweet, he/she is interacting with the platform and content but not directly contributing to the conversation. On the other hand, when one user tweets or replies to another user's tweet, it is arguable that he or she is directly initiating a conversation. Hence, tweeting and replying to tweets are seen as

‘macro’ modes of participation because they broadly facilitate discursions, which could influence decision-making and self-representation in contemporary Twitter discourses. The analysis in this research will mostly focus on tweets and replies, which are the most conversational features of Twitter.

Kenyans, Rwandans and Ugandans on Twitter: Overview

A recent study on *How Africa Tweets* shows that based on the volume of geo-located tweets, Kenya ranks fourth on the African continent. Rwanda is the only country with its President among top 10 hashtags – ‘#Kagame’ was the second most popular hashtag (Portland Communication, 2016). Another study by Twiplomacy (2015) indicates that Kagame and Kenyatta are among the most conversational presidents on Twitter. While these studies present interesting findings, they only tell part of a very complicated story as the following discussion will show.

Does the president really tweet?

This question is important to this thesis because knowing whether the president tweets or not could determine how audiences engage and interact with him/her on Twitter. Several studies have argued that audiences are subjective (Corner, 2011:100-106) – they have the ability to adjust their character (tone and language) to suit the communicative situation. This argument suggests that audiences can change their character depending on whom they are communicating with, for what purpose and so on. This is not surprising because everyday life is indeed a performance. For instance, people are more likely to engage the president in Twitter conversations when they know that he/she tweets compared to when someone else tweets on his/her behalf. This is simply because communication is personal and making meaning of discourses involves associating them with the source.

Another vital reason why it is important to know whether the president tweets is the issue of ‘getting heard’ (Carpentier, 2011:359; Dahlgren, 2013:20; Gauntlett, 2011:232). Nick Miganda’s tweet to his president seems to sum up this argument ‘@ukenyatta , will I get your attention one day my president? Mr. president, if you happen to read this tweet, please I need your help’ (2015). According to Dahlgren, the subjective engagement behind making one’s voice heard ‘and the participation in which it results can have varying degrees of affective intensity, from the fully passionate [...] to the mildest [...]. The variance has something to do with the personality’ (2013:20). Although tweets are generally public, some tweets are addressed to certain individuals and knowing that the intended

recipient will read it and respond is fundamental to nourishing the intensity of the conversation.

Although Twitter is becoming a popular tool among the political elite, the idea that a president really tweets himself is still widely doubted. Some of this doubt stems from the fact that presidents delegate most of their tasks to assistants so that they can take care of the 'official business'. Reading through President Kagame's tweets, it is not surprising to see how often he responds to the question 'Is that really you Mr. President?' This question can be understood to mean two things: (i) whether the Twitter account really belongs to the president (ii) whether the president writes the tweets himself. This thesis will pay more attention to the latter meaning since the Twitter accounts of Museveni, Kagame and Kenyatta are all Twitter verified – hence, they are officially recognized.

As one of his Twitter followers pointed out, Kagame's tweets tell a revealing story of how much his tweeting style has changed since he joined Twitter in 2009. Unlike his tweets from 2010 onwards, tweets from 2009 were not composed in first person and this could explain why some people think that perhaps someone else wrote those tweet or even doubt whether Kagame himself tweets at all. There has been even more evidence to stimulate the skepticism. In March 2014, The Washington Post wrote 'A stray tweet may have exposed Paul Kagame's Twitter ghostwriter, and maybe much more' (Adam Taylor, 2014). Meanwhile, in Uganda, what started as a conflict amongst the Presidential Press Unit (PPU) over maintenance of Museveni's social media accounts, publicly revealed that he does not tweet for himself (Okuda, 2014). In Kenya, Kenyatta has been described as a tech-savvy president and many have no doubt that he tweets. Nonetheless, in Rwanda and Africa in general, Kagame is famous for his 'do it yourself' character and many have no doubt that he tweets.

What does the president tweet about?

The results of the semi-qualitative study show that about 42% of all tweets by Kagame were categorized as formal, 39% were acknowledgements while 19% were informal. 39% of all Kagame's tweets were acknowledgements, which means that those engagements with other Twitter users did not go beyond a 'thank you', 'agree with you' or 'you are welcome'. This finding was quite interesting because based on Twitonomy data which shows that 81.4% of all tweets by Kagame are replies, it is easy to assume that most or even all of his replies are aimed at encouraging more debate. On the contrary, this finding indicated that some responses are more likely to bring a conversation to an end instead of probing it to continue. If we sum up informal tweets and acknowledgements, it is arguable

that majority of Kagame's tweets (58%) are neither aimed at initiating public debate nor igniting it – but the political manifests in almost every kind of conversation including informal and acknowledgement tweets as we shall see.

81.2% of all tweets by Museveni were formal, 18.4% informal and 0.4% were acknowledgements. While Museveni tweets in a very conversational tone and focuses on key social, political and economic issues most of the time, a critical analysis of his tweets indicated that he does not reply to others often, which limits the possibility of engaging others in debate.

Who is involved in or excluded from the conversations?

The Twitonomy data further reveals the number of users mentioned with in the tweets of each of the presidents; Kagame mentioned other users 2,047 times, Museveni 77 while Kenyatta 1,101 times. A deeper analysis reveals the identities of the Twitter users behind these mentions.

Out of the 20 users Kagame interacts with most (based on the number of replies) on Twitter, 4 are Rwandans, 6 of them are Ugandans and majority of them are journalists by profession. Further analysis shows that 351 of Kagame's tweets were conversations he had with the top 20 people he interacts with. Out of these top 20, the most replied to user has received 39 replies from Kagame while the least replied to received 11 replies.

13 of Kenyatta's top 20 most replied to users are Kenyans. Two of them are top officials in his government, that is the Vice President and the Prime Minister, a few of them are individuals while majority are organisations or institutions.

14 of the top 20 users Museveni replied to the most are Ugandans, with no more than one reply per individual.

Participation in what?

If we view Twitter as an integral component in the realm of the contemporary public sphere, we must be open to the possibility that as people interact, discourses of all kind take shape. Therefore, as a user of Twitter, the president is mediating his experience and hence participating in and through the discourses. In order to understand how the president engages others in debate through Twitter, we need to link his discursive practices to discourses in the public and private spheres.

The mediated self, identity and political performance

Everyday life has become more mediated than ever before in human history. People use all genres available to them to express themselves and participate in all spheres of life. These enacted practices of self-representation constitute what has come to be known as the mediated self or the narratives of the self. For instance, when we tweet, we are literally mediating our experiences (narratives) through discourse. The mediated experiences constitute not just the discourse of the self; they also constitute a performance of the self and dimensions of identity often presented with the goal of impressing others (Goffman, 1959:17). Stuart Hall argues that identities are 'points of attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (1996:6). When people participate in these discursive practices (or discourses) they enact and perform the self to suit the communicative situation. Therefore, discursive practices are not just means of representing the self but are part of the self-identity process. Goffman's work on *Presentation of the self in everyday life* (1959) shows that self-representation is important in defining an individual's place in society.

All three presidents use Twitter to emphasize the need for Africans to do things their way. This political discourse bears its roots in the Pan Africanist school of thought, which encourages Africans to unite and build a universal African identity. These presidents use Twitter to condemn those who impose Western ideologies on Africa, arguing; 'let Rwanda (and) Africa be the best place(s) they can' (Kagame, 2011i); 'Africa must start looking inwards for solutions' (Kenyatta, 2015a). Perhaps, many Africans agree that the West should let Africans do things their way. This example illustrates how Kagame and Kenyatta use discourse to identify with Africans, as victims of Western domination but the two are also negotiating their roles as social agents, who have solutions to the problem. Therefore, the discourse of Pan Africanism can be seen as a mediated mechanism used by the president to present their position on this issue and this presents opportunities for them to discuss the issue with others who share interest. The discourse of Pan Africanism shows how these presidents are involved in the process of transforming Africa's 'sovereignty' and political identity.

Anthony Giddens views the process of identity formation as a 'reflexive project of the self'. According to Giddens, self-identity is something we create, revise and maintain; like a biography, it is continuous; it integrates and reconciles events occurring in the external world to fit in the story of the self (1991:53-54). Creating, revising and maintaining identity relies on use of language and performance of the 'everyday'. Although these leaders use the discourse of identity to encourage Africans to participate in the Pan Africanist project, the notion of

citizenship remains contested and in many cases restricted. For example, Mutabazi shared his concerns about Kagame and the fear that his government has instilled in Rwandans:

Edouard S. Mutabazi: @PaulKagame I am Rwandan and I've learned not to hide...You should hear the discouragements I get from my own family not to speak my mind. (2011a)

Paul Kagame: @EdouardMutabazi. ...majority of Rws override yours because they live this life they enjoy increasingly ...u r totally detached from it (2011a)

Paul Kagame: @EdouardMutabazi. So u r not a Rwandan or u r claiming to be an exceptn...u dont hide! But for millions to be like that u describe... (2011c)

In this conversation, Mutabazi identifies himself as a citizen of Rwanda. For Kagame, Mutabazi is an outsider 'detached' from the everyday life of Rwandans. Kagame's responses to Mutabazi seem to suggest that citizenship is about hegemony – that Mutabazi's defiance means he is not a citizen. According to Fairclough, 'the theory of hegemony highlights both how power relations constrain and control productivity and creativity in discourse practice' (1995:2). Kagame's reflexivity shows how politics is a performance. His response to Mutabazi seems to suggest that the two are having a casual conversation and yet, it can also be argued that Kagame's response is a way of controlling how Mutabazi participates.

Also both Kenyatta and Kagame regularly tweet in their local languages (Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda respectively). Among other things, such as creating a sense of identity and self-representation through languages, this also shows that these presidents are specifically interested in connecting with their citizens.

Connecting through culture

Fairclough (1997:270) argues that discourse constitutes society and culture. Twitter discourses of these presidents show that they are immersed in the (re)production of culture. Therefore, discourse can be seen as a way of connecting with others through different forms of cultural domains/products such as popular culture and cultural citizenship. According to Joke Hermes:

cultural citizenship can be defined as the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-

related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture (2005b:10).

The interest here is how culture becomes an apparatus not just of identity but also of what is acceptable and popular or not. The ideology of Pan Africanism, for instance, can be viewed as an aspect of cultural citizenship. As Kenyatta asserts 'We refuse to be carried along in a vehicle that has strayed off-course to the detriment of our sovereignty, security and dignity as Africans' (2015). The issue of making Africa sovereign in the post-colonial era goes beyond a political struggle. It also becomes an initiative taken by Africans to connect with their fellows and build an imagined community of resistance. Therefore, the process of reflecting on the relationship between African states and the west and criticizing that relationship based on popular beliefs becomes an on-going process. In this case, it becomes a cultural right to subscribe to one aspect of political discourse instead of another. Hence, hegemony could be seen as a choice and product of popular culture – instead of domination. So, when Kagame and Kenyatta tweet that Africans need to do things their way, among other things, they are trying to connect with others through engaging in a 'popular discourse'. The presidents are also aware that this topic has a huge and growing audience in Africa and beyond.

To take this argument of cultural citizenship a notch deeper, another key observation about Kagame's tweets is that he uses a lot of shorthand. Although this can be attributed to the 140-character limit, it can also be viewed as a way to appeal to 'informal users' of Twitter – the youthful Rwandans in particular – considering that shorthand is mostly popular among young people. After a heated Twitter chat with Kagame, Ian Birrell, a British journalist wrote 'this was strange enough [...] since his missives to me were peppered with the sort of text abbreviations used by teenagers (such as "Wrong u r ...")' (Birrell, 2011b). Using shorthand on a presidential account is particularly interesting because it is considered 'informal' hence controversial when used by political elites. But, political communication is about the style one chooses and this might well be Kagame's style. Dahlgren maintains, 'the political style of individual politicians becomes central to how audiences experience them and evaluate their performance' (2009:137). This could explain why Kagame's tweeting style has not changed even though it is considered 'informal' or strange as Birrell puts it.

Beyond the tweeting style, the presidents are not afraid to tweet away their individual passions. Museveni regularly tweets to wish the national football team success and according to Hermes (2005a:33) supporting a national football team demonstrates one's commitment to 'nationalism'. Kagame's tweets also show that

he is a big fan of Arsenal Football Club. Passion for football is an activity that brings people of all walks of life together. In fact, the English Premier League is arguably as popular on the African continent as it is in England. Fans pay to watch live televised matches.

The use of personal fantasies among the political elite is crucial in everyday life and political discourse because it appeals to the passion and pleasure of others. Therefore, when presidents tweet about their personal interests, they openly express their passion for things and this is a way of connecting with audiences (publics) at a personal level (Gauntlett, 2011:4). In fact, Twitter discourses show that people tweet to ask the president whether he watched the match or what he thinks about results of the match and the president's tweets show that he tends to reply to such engagements. This is arguably an interesting way of connecting with the public. It is also important to mention that even though some have warned about the danger of passion in politics (Hall, 2011), Africa has the world's youngest population and use of passion to stimulate political engagement might not be so bad considering that political engagement is dwindling globally. Hence, one may argue that when the presidents tweet their passion, they create more opportunities to interact with the digital natives (people born and raised in the digital age) and other Twitter users.

Even though some have argued that popular culture and politics are two independent domains, the conversation below emphasizes that the two are intertwined. Dahlgren argues, 'the political is always potentially embedded in – and emerges from – anywhere in the broad terrain of the social' (2013:20). This conversation conveys a typical example where the discourse of changing leadership of a football team leads to changing political leadership of the nation. Moreover, it also shows how Kagame is being very reflexive about his use of the word 'chance' a typical attribute of performative politics.

Paul Kagame: '@Etalephil. I very much support arsenal-but to be honest Wenger needs to coach another team now and Arsenal needs another Coach for +ve ...' (2012b)

Paul Kagame: '@Etalephil ..change to happen!!! Otherwise the team and the coach seem to be stuck with each other for no good! (2012a)

NESN Soccer: '@PaulKagame You've been quoted in my @Storify story: 'Paul Kagame Calls on Arsene Wenger to Step Down' <http://sfy.co/W3L> (2012)

Paul Kagame: @NESNSoccer. Btw. I talked about need for change..! It can be about people or things-that have to change-in reference to my favourite team (2012e)

Paul Kagame: @MCXIMCXI. Sure...soon I will leave...! (2012d)

Paul Kagame: @MCXIMCXI ..but since I talked about change in any case, I will try to change a few more things for the better!light heart in all this though (2012c)

Kagame who has already served the two terms provided for in the constitution is expected to return for a third term. The discourse of change is contested because of the growing number of 'life presidents' in Africa (like Museveni who has been president since 1986). In the above conversation Kagame tried to alter the message saying change 'can be people or things' which shows his awareness of the political associations of the word change. This essentially shows that the president is participating in politics.

Tweeting Politics and Power

As President Kagame (2015e) notes in a tweet, the only way we can explain progress anywhere in the world starts with 'understanding how our citizens are involved in governance'. According to him, that is "true democracy". Dahlgren concurs that 'democracy needs people's participation' but to him, what is even more important is the fact that 'views on what forms this should take and how much is desirable can vary significantly' (2013:11). What Dahlgren is trying to say is that the forms through which people participate in democracy and the intensity of participation are critical in assessing the nature of democracy.

Today, our understanding of democracy mostly (but not entirely) evolves around the notion of participation. Indeed, participation has been used as a yardstick to measure achievements in democratization processes and diversification of culture (Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013:266). But, participation has also been criticized for its 'half full, half empty character, where it can mean anything and nothing (Carpentier, 2011:126). Therefore, in this era of 'digital democracy', true participation will ever become more elusive and ambiguous. The fact that participation could be reduced to a mere technique invites us to first of all investigate whether presidents like Kagame practice what they preach – involve their citizens in (debate on) governance – and secondly to understand how their activity on Twitter affects participation in public debate among citizens.

A quick skim through the tweets of these presidents shows that each of them tweets regularly – on average one tweet a day each – and about a varied range of issues; from public service delivery to corruption in public institutions, from the highly contested presidential term limits to peace and security, from the issue of media freedom to freedom of expression. For Instance, it is astonishing to read a Twitter conversation where Kagame is discussing one of the problems dwarfing the legitimacy of African democracy – the issue of African leaders who overstay in power – at a time when he is seeking to run for a third term. In February 2013, Charles Onyango-Obbo, a Ugandan journalist tweeted:

@PaulKagame Debate Starts In Rwanda On Whether Prez Kagame Goes For 3rd Term [...].

This prompted Kagame's response:

@cobbo3. ..changing constitution (on term limit) wasn't the issue even if pple might have had it in mind as u have your difrnt views...(2013a).

Two Rwandans joined this conversation saying that the discussion was about how Rwandans can maintain the achievements met under Kagame's regime and political stability. According to the Twitter profiles of those two Rwandans, one is a communications analyst the other a Member of Rwanda Parliament. Kagame's response (above) seems to show denial because without a constitutional amendment, he would not be eligible to run for a third term but most importantly, his response to Onyango-Obbo invited these two Rwandans to contribute to this discussion.

Meanwhile, in July 2015, Rwanda's Democratic Green Party, the main opposition party, complained that they had failed to find a lawyer to challenge Kagame's intention to stand for a third term in the Supreme Court. According to the Green Party, five lawyers had refused to take on the case, some citing fear for their lives while others said that they were not ready to challenge a decision backed by millions of Rwandans (AFP, 2015). As a result, the courts of law dismissed the case.

Surprisingly, on 10th August 2015, Kagame tweeted about that court case saying 'Many thanks to the tireless legal team, friends and the unbreakable Rwandan spirit'. Kagame's tweet seems to suggest that justice was served but the allegations by the opposition signal that there is more to his tweet. This tweet vividly combines two discourses, one is a claim that justice has been served therefore

Kagame's 'tireless legal team' (2015c) was rewarded. The second discourse is victory for Kagame, the legal team and the people – as he puts it 'the unbreakable Rwandan spirit' to show that he has peoples' support. The question becomes, was Kagame genuinely implying that justice was served in this case given Green Party's allegations? Or should Kagame's tweet be viewed as band-aid used to cover-up the alleged oppression? This example demonstrates the performative nature of politics where politicians use the media to represent impressions of the self in the public sphere. Nevertheless, many Rwandans replied to that tweet congratulating and praising him for being a great leader. However, a heated debate ensued when Levi Kones, a Kenyan TV host replied to that same tweet cautioning the president not to ruin his legacy:

Levi Kones: @PaulKagame I really hope sir, you will not ruin your legacy by being President for life. (2015)

Paul Kagame: @levikones worry more about your own legacy ...if you got any at all to think about!!(2015a)

Kenyans on Twitter viewed Kagame's response as an arrogant way of brushing off criticism. This stirred a heated conversation under the hashtag #SomeoneTellKagame. Kenyans accused Kagame of clinging on to power and failing to exercise true democracy (Kasami, 2015). Some Rwandans weighed in on the debate to support their president, telling Kones to let Rwandans decide what is right for them (Karangwa, 2015):

Iradukunda Liliane: @levikones @PaulKagame ohhh poor you Levi!!! Who are you to say so???As long as HE will be able us rwandans we want him as president!!! (2015)

Muneza Patrick: @levikones do you consider yourself a teacher to teach him what is good? if yes where were you in 1994 to teach Habyara? kagame is our gift (2015)

But not all Rwandans were pro-Kagame. Some expressed concerns about his regime:

Rwandanism: @levikones @NormanIshimwe @PaulKagame Kones u r saying what 80% of Rwandans want although they cant say it coz PK assassination machine. (2015)

Beyond the meaning of the discourses (which will be discussed in detail later), the Twitter debate above vividly makes two things clear. First, the fact that the president is willing to participate in such a contested and ‘unmoderated’ conversation albeit ‘arrogantly’ as Kenyans have argued shows that he is willing to engage in a debate. Secondly, the president’s response to Kones sparked off the intense debate that followed. By replying to such tweets, the president is probably well aware of the implications – that he is opening up space for a highly contested debate. And, that his response gives the issue more attention than it would achieve if he chooses not to reply. If we take the assumption that tweeting democracy is about opening up space for debate, replying to others and engaging in a heated debate like the example above, then it is arguable that the president is indeed participating in democracy. Yet, the discussion in the previous paragraphs seems to suggest that the president’s tweets are not as democratic as he claims because there are allegations against him. In fact, even the response to Kones ‘worry more about your own legacy’ (Kagame, 2015a) can be interpreted to mean ‘mind your own business’. Based on this interpretation, it is arguable that Kagame was not participating in debate at all; his intention was to shut Kones up.

Hague and Loader note that it is important to assess how the notion of ‘digital democracy’ fits in contemporary society where representative models of democracy are dominant and yet politicians are increasingly ‘tarnished with allegations of sleaze, corruption, self-seeking behavior and sound-bite politics’ (1999:4-5). As a result, the duo argues, many citizens have lost interest in politics. These authors were optimistic about the potential of ‘new’ technologies in shaping the future of politics. In light of Hague and Loader’s prospect for digital democracy, the idea of having presidents on Twitter sounds very exciting but it can also be an empty shell depending on how the president decides to use the platform. For instance, Museveni and Kenyatta tweet often about their state duties, who they are meeting, about what and where, almost in real time. This is important for a democracy. Among other things, it shows that the president is being transparent about his everyday activities, which is a form of being accountable to the citizens. However, making this information available to the public on Twitter makes debate inevitable and deliberation can only be meaningful if the president participates. The data from this research shows that what sets Kagame apart from Museveni and Kenyatta is the fact that he is not only willing to broadcast his personal opinions (tweets), he is also willing to respond to his critics and engage them in a heated debate. Therefore, sharing information with others is important but the president should also be willing to engage in the debate that follows.

Take, for instance, President Kenyatta's tweet: 'Attending #COP21 meeting with Environment CS @JudiWakhungu at Le Bourget in Paris, France' (2015c). This tweet attracted a number of responses, some showing support to the president, others complaining about the fact that he travels too much while others picked on the fact that the president was traveling with his daughter hence wasting tax payers' money:

Judith Dora: Wishing President @ukenyatta and CS Prof @judiwakhungu all the best as you face the rigid developed economies on #ClimateChange at #COP21 (2015)

Simon Maithya: @UKenyatta @JudiWakhungu Why waste resourcing transporting tourists to France (2015)

Dan: @ukenyatta can't wait for you to visit Kenya again. (2015)

The president did not respond to any of the over 40 direct responses to his tweet. Besides, this did not break the spirit of Kenyans on Twitter who continued to mock the president using the hashtag #UhuruInKenya – reminding him that he spends more time abroad (Otieno, 2015). The president's influence in initiating this debate is very clear because through his updates people are able to know when he is out of the country, who he is traveling with, when he returns, and they are also able to tweet their opinions to him. It is also important to note that the president's official duties and schedule are normally not accessible to the public. However, the discourse of 'open governance' continues to influence presidents to open access to information. Therefore, as media continue to saturate everyday life, use of platforms like Twitter to share information with citizens and open up space for citizens to participate in democratic processes is a signifier of digital democracy. Yet, making information available to citizens without engaging them in the subsequent debate signals major difficulties in the acclaimed participatory nature of digital democracy.

How much political participation is desirable: Minimalist vs. maximalist

Nico Carpentier distinguishes two dimensions of participation, namely minimalist and maximalist (2011:69-70). He argues that the former seeks to minimize participation through accentuating representation models of democracy

while the latter maximizes participation through striking a balance between representation and participation. While Carpentier notes that even ‘maximalist participatory models only rarely aim to impose participation’ (2011:126) he says that maximalist forms of participation are important in extending ‘the ongoing democratic revolution’ (Ibid:358). His interest is in the character and intensity of participation in political discourse and decision-making processes.

For example, President Kenyatta tweeted, ‘Receiving H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni for an official visit at State House, Nairobi’ (2016). Museveni was in Nairobi to discuss the construction of the proposed oil-pipeline. Kenyans responded to this tweet reminding the president about issues to discuss, from the raging dispute between Uganda and Kenya over Migingo Island to fighting corruption:

Peter Kanuvi: @UKenyatta Can u also include Migingo issue in ur talks for the good of Kenyans living there. (2016)

Daniel G. Njeru: @UKenyatta leadership transformation is key to a key to Kenya's projected growth. It starts with shift focus to passing on to the youth (2016)

Baker Semakalu: @UKenyatta Your excellencies Uhuru Kenyatta and Yoweri Museveni regional integration is good but take Tanzanian way first; fight corruption (2016)

These tweets show that Twitter can facilitate direct conversations between the president and the public, and even enable them to crowdsource ideas for the president. In this way, we see possibilities for maximalist modes of participation albeit these ideas will only feed into decision-making on condition that citizens get heard. Whether the citizens got heard remains arguable but the president did not respond to any of these tweets. This example also shows how ‘the presence of the multiplicity of voices’ becomes awash with competition for attention and recognition among users (Silverstone, 2013:81). But as his tweet suggests, the visit was ‘official’, therefore Kenyatta was probably just broadcasting an update and not looking for public participation.

Prior to his election as president in 2013, Kenyatta served as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in Kenya. In 2011, he tweeted ‘Morning guys. I hope you are all well. Please play your part in the budget making process. Your voice counts.’ He continued to engage with Kenyans reminding them to participate in the budget making process, giving instructions on how to participate and at the end he thanked all those who participated. In 2012, he

tweeted 'Hey guys. I'd like to invite you to share your ideas on the 2012 - 2013 Budget following the success we had last year'. These two tweets show that before he was elected president, Kenyatta used Twitter in a slightly different way compared to how he uses it as president. It is even arguable that he was more conversational and he was rhetorically more eager of maximalist forms of participation through the platform.

Carpentier further proposes an understanding of two forms of media participation to elaborate on audience activity – these are 'participation *in* the media and participation *through* the media' (2011:67). Participation through the media, he argues, presents 'opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and for self-representation in the variety of public spaces that characterize the social' (p.67). This not only creates opportunities for citizens to voice their opinions, they also get to interact with others through deliberation and public debate afforded by the platform. On the other hand, participation in the media deals with the everyday practices of citizens as media content producers (or consumers).

Although participation *in* and *through* the media are interrelated, their distinction is important in understanding the usually taken-for-granted view that 'if they are tweeting, they are participating' (Carpentier, 2012:170). In the example above, the Kenyans and their president are participating in the media. However, lack of a response from the president to citizens not only limits the intensity of deliberation, it also underscores the minimalist models of participation, albeit this does not stop citizens from tweeting the president. This example highlights the privileged nature of institutionalized politics, which thrives at the lapse of the citizen-representative relationship. In this relationship, the citizens have delegated their power to an elected leader who decides when to give them an update, about what and also chooses whether to respond to them or not. And, even though social media is viewed as a more democratized participatory space, this example also shows how the president can use his influence to regulate or control participation; (i) through sharing selected updates with the public and (ii) deciding whether to reply or not.

In a nutshell, it is arguable that the minimalist models of participation serve to increase information consumption while maximalist models work to stimulate self-representation and dialogue, which are more likely to influence decision-making. If Kenyatta used Twitter as a conversational tool, he would not stop at updating citizens, he would also respond to their tweets. Replying to citizens would then not be seen as a mere invitation to participate but an imperative step in promoting maximalist participatory models. Moreover, Carpentier sees some problems with the maximalist models:

Even the contemporary maximalist participatory models only rarely aim to impose participation. Their necessary embeddedness in a democratic culture protects against a post-political reduction of participation to a mere technique, but also against the enforcement of participation. (2012:172)

The problem with the invitation to participate is that it could be riddled by conditions such as power, identity and citizenship to delimit participation. Take the conversation between Kones and Kagame for example. Although Kones was participating in a seemingly open debate, Rwandans asked him 'who are you' and told him to 'let them decide what is right for Rwanda'. While these responses convey a debate and arguably maximalist modes of participation through the media, such responses also confine the conversation within the conventional parameters of citizenship to oppose participation of 'outsiders'. This antagonism is not only contrary to the cosmopolitan vision of globalizing participation in contemporary politics it also attempts to subjugate and discredit participation of the 'other'. Yet, in her account of the agonistic model of democracy, Chantal Mouffe argues that this 'agonistic confrontation' does not jeopardize democracy, rather, it is a 'condition for its existence' (1999a:756). Moreover, beyond the fact that Twitter creates space for leaders and citizens to actively participate in political discourse, we also get reminded of 'the problems related to reflexivity, listening to others and working with difference, identity verification, processes of domination and exclusion' (Carpentier, 2011:119). For the Rwandans, the responses to Kones can be elaborated to show vibrant citizens, who are using their social power to demand responsibility of the others. And here we see how differences based on identity form points for departure and exclusion. The problem with this antagonism in political discourse is that it could obscure reason, a critical element of deliberation.

Therefore, platforms like Twitter can be used to perform many purposes but they have their own limits as Carpentier contends:

The investigation of the limits to the deployment of media technologies for participatory ends brings us first to the debate on the neutrality of technology (2011: 272-273).

Social determinists like Fred Casmir have explored the issue of neutrality further arguing that social and political circumstances are vital to fully grasp the relationship between society and media technologies (2013: 89-90). Twitter 'does not operate in a social vacuum' (Dahlgren, 2013: 34). It exists in a socially constructed world where the media converge and diverge. Therefore, in order to

achieve the full participation potential through this platform, we must take note of the societal forces that shape user practices (how we use or not use) and the so-called empowered practices, and find ways to break out of that rigidity and the binding hegemonic forces. This also involves scrutinizing issues of power, access and control (van Dijk, 2008:89-92) in mediated space.

Participation and its limits in the Twittersphere: A turn to power

What is exciting about a president on Twitter is the anticipation that on this platform he/she is 'a user' like everybody else. This view perceives Twitter as a platform that not only facilitates deliberation but also one that attempts to challenge power structures through enabling citizens to use the same platform that their president uses and allowing them to tweet him at their convenience. However, authors such as Foucault (1989) have warned that the issue of power is always present in the broad terrain of the social. No wonder, in his account on deliberative democracy, Dahlgren (2009:86) contends that one of the limitations of deliberation in the public sphere is the problem of power. He notes two dimensions of power, namely social and discursive power, albeit the two are intertwined. But, what is power and how is it related to participation and its limits?

Power is the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interests, and values. (Castells, 2009:10)

In order to grasp the limitation of participation in democratic processes, media and political sociologist strongly recommend that one needs to understand who holds power, how they use it and to whose benefit. It is important to note that while in some societies power structures are well defined, power can also be amorphous. Formless elements of power usually manifest through communicative practices – through use of language, symbols and texts. For example, the word 'president' is a symbolic element of power. Discourses with the president on Twitter indicate how titles such as 'sir', 'your excellency', 'Mr. President' and the like are common in addressing him. This shows that although people might have this unrivalled access to the president through tweets, they are also aware that they are participating in a debate with a powerful person.

Just like in offline engagements, the president is a figure of authority in Twitter conversations and he/she can also use a mix of authority and communicative capabilities to build consent. Dahlgren further argues, 'the distribution of communicative skills tends to follow general social hierarchies' (2009:92). As the

nature of their job demands, Presidents are good public speakers. Therefore they possess special communicative competencies. These imbalances in power and communicative competencies could explain why deliberative democracy does not necessarily serve the needs of the citizens, rather, it serves 'to conceal and legitimate its own symbolic power' (p.93). Communicative power is enhanced by the fact that these presidents also have a huge number of followers on Twitter – Museveni with about 214,000, Kagame 1.34 million and Kenyatta 1.33 million followers. While the number of followers does not necessarily reflect endorsement or support for the president, these numbers could be used to elaborate the influence of a politician in social life (online and offline).

Castells also notes that social power is not only embedded in social institutions but also prevails among and against social actors. He argues that empowerment of one group of social actors is inseparable from 'their empowerment against other social actors. [...] Thus societies are not communities, sharing values and interests. They are contradictory social structures enacted in conflicts and negotiations among diverse and often opposing social actors' (2009:13-14). The question here would be, does the fact that Mutabazi questions Rwanda's hegemony make him more empowered than other Rwandans? Or just to twist this, does the fact that Mutabazi does not live in Rwanda make him a lesser citizen? Perhaps the answer is a no. Yet, as we saw in the discussion above, Kagame confronted him on these two fronts to discredit his argument. The discourse between Kones and Kenyans on Twitter against Kagame (mentioned above) beautifully elaborates the point of empowerment against others – 'citizens' against 'foreigner'. And in this case, perhaps it is not just about one group being more empowered than the other (through citizenship) but even the liberty of the 'other' (Kenyans) to comment on the politics of Rwanda can be seen as a form of empowerment. As an outsider, you probably do not possess the same level of responsibility or tacit knowledge about the country's issues and yet through Twitter you can impose your opinion from 'a safe distance'. This could explain why Rwandans told Kones to let them do what is right for their own country – because, Kones is simply in no position to make a decision for them.

Kones' example also demonstrates how the ideology of Pan Africanism loses meaning when the liberation struggle comes down to an individual African nation-state against another instead of the continent as a whole. This explains why the notion of citizenship is highly contested in contemporary political discourse – because through citizenship we identity the self from the other and (re)claim our right to belong and participate. However, the right to belong is often inseparable from social forces such as domination and exclusion. Use of Pan Africanism to

create new political identities has serious political implications. One is that, all Africans bear the burden of being accountable to one another since each has to contribute to this liberation struggle. It is only through mutual accountability that this political identity can be nourished and sustained. When these presidents use the discourse of Pan Africanism on Twitter, they seem to explicitly suggest that Africa is one, and that all Africans should equally contribute to the dream of building an African political identity. From this understanding, Kone's tweet to Kagame can be seen as a way to demand accountability from a fellow African. Yet, as Kagame's response to Kone's suggest, 'worry more about your own legacy' meaning that he is not to be accountable to others.

In his book, *Communication Power*, Castells asserts that the potential to shape the human mind is an elemental form of power. He elaborates how communication processes use various forms of control to shape society's understanding of power:

The ability to build consent, or at least to instill fear and resignation vis-à-vis the existing order, is essential to enforce the rules that govern the institutions and organizations of society (2009:3).

In a socially constructed world, all social interactions with the everyday are through language. Through language, society builds consensus on common meaning or understanding of different symbols and signs to create values and norms that organize society. However, it is important to note that the meaning making process is continuous, negotiated and often contested. Social constructionists argue that:

all the objects of our consciousness, every 'thing' we think of or talk about, including our identities and our selves, is constructed through language, manufactured out of discourses (Burr, 2015:122).

Michel Foucault's work on language and knowledge shows how the process of formalization of meanings involves stripping language of its contents leaving nothing visible except the 'discourses that are universally valid' (1989: 331). For instance, it is almost impossible to talk about Rwanda without mentioning the 1994 'Rwanda genocide', an event that has (re)defined social order of the 'new Rwanda'. The dominant discourse about this genocide is that the then ruling *Hutus* killed the *Tutsi* minority. It is also alleged that the Hutus used radio and newspapers to disseminate hate speech (Bizimana, 2014). In Rwanda, use of media to stir ethnic hatred and violence has been termed as 'hate media'.

Consequently, it is impossible to talk about the genocide without talking about the media.

The following excerpt of a Twitter conversation between President Kagame and two Ugandans features a discussion about the issue of media control in Rwanda:

Patrick Mugumya: @PaulKagame you will agree with me that african history has many situations of leaders not keeping their word (2011b)

Paul Kagame: @mugumya. If u r a good student of history as u argue others to be, then remember where Rw.has come from too, to be where it s now....! (2011e)

The above conversation illuminates something that is very interesting about discourse - which is, how discourses contribute to the 'order of things'. In the opening lines of the conversation, Mugumya notes what 'history' says about African leaders. Kagame's response uses the same discourse of history but with a twist that invites Mugumya to 'remember'. Foucault's work highlights the centrality of 'power of recall' in contemporary discourse. Through recall, we juxtapose and make impression of the present and the past (1989:76). Without this comparison, Mugumya would not be able to see the difference between Kagame and 'African leaders who do not keep their word'. While it remains arguable whether Kagame uses Rwanda's history to coerce and persuade his way out of the argument, his response certainly demonstrates how communicative power becomes an instrumental tool in contemporary political discourse. Van Dijk asserts, 'if we are able to influence people's minds, e.g., their knowledge or opinions, we indirectly may control (some of) their actions, as we know from persuasion and manipulation' (2008: 89).

Mugumya also expressed his concern about Rwandan reporters who had been sentenced to 17 years; for allegedly stirring up hatred against the government when they wrote an article saying, 'some Rwandans were unhappy with the country's rulers' (BBC, 2011).

Patrick Mugumya: @PaulKagame don't you think these reporters have been given extremely long sentences, <http://bbc.in/hVNZfj> (2011a)

Grace Natabaalo: @PaulKagame media in Rw is being suppressed. Why won't you let it flourish? (2011d)

Paul Kagame: @Natabaalo. I am not sure what that means...but I wish 1-gov'ts r those that really represent n work for their ppl 2-outspoken journalists.. (2011h)

Paul Kagame: @Natabaalo ...means, those who have a sense of accountability n responsibility ...! N really invest in their time n effort to analyse issues (2011f)

Grace Natabaalo: @PaulKagame i do understand, especially for country like Rw that has been through so much but a recent report.... (2011c)

Grace Natabaalo: @PaulKagame ...said vague laws on genocide were silencing the media (2011a)

Paul Kagame: @Natabaalo from almost nothing,a decade n half ago to 70 local newspapers n 2 dozen fm radios n free flow of foreign media i dont .. (2011g)

Grace Natabaalo: @PaulKagame but a big number of media outlets doesn't translate into press freedom. Bt 4 what its worth i think u are a great leader (2011b)

In the aftermath of the genocide, 'hate media' is punishable by law. In the conversation above Kagame uses the discourse of 'accountability and responsibility' to defend his government's actions and shifts the blame to the media arguing that they need to be accountable. He further uses words such as 'from almost nothing' to illuminate where Rwanda has come from and numbers to show the progress made. Foucault views these comparative (or imaginative) elements of discourse as a 'limiting and conditional position (without which and beyond which one cannot know)' (1989:76). Memory of a genocide usually evokes sympathy for the victims and guilt among those who did not act against it. This example illustrates how discourses maintain or alter the order of things through subjecting our judgment to limited and conditional positions (as points) of reference – the 'power of recall'. Although Natabaalo is a journalist by profession and she seems to strongly disagree with the president Kagame's actions, at the end of the conversation she seems to sympathize saying 'for what it's worth' Kagame is a great leader. While these are all common words in everyday talk, in this particular conversation we see how the combination of these words forms a convincing narrative to justify that arresting those journalists was a form of disciplinary action to regulate their controversial behaviour (Foucault, 1980: 145). Fairclough (1995:114) also observes the interconnectedness between the choice of vocabulary and its ideological implications in social settings.

Language and memory, Giddens argues, 'are intrinsically connected, both on the level of individual recall and that of the institutionalization of collective experience' (1991:23). Many of Kagame's critics accuse his government of promoting the purported Tutsi hegemonic project as a tool to restrict access to

social and political spheres. Until present day, the genocide continues to shape Rwanda's social and political order. In October 2014, the government of Rwanda took BBC *Kinyarwanda* radio off air after BBC produced a documentary 'Rwanda's untold story'. The documentary questioned the single story of the genocide claiming that the government was using it to oppress the Hutus. Although one of Kagame's old tweets read, 'Whichever side of the divide one stands..No one has monopoly of the Truth,no one side or individual has exclusive claim to be right ...!' (2011j), the genocide is not debatable beyond the conventional rhetoric and those who attempt to transgress – like BBC, are accused of 'genocide denial'. But, as van Dijk puts it, 'members of more powerful social groups and institutions, and especially their leaders (the elites), have more or less exclusive access to, and control over, one or more types of public discourse' (2008:90). The discourses have shown that political power can be used to monopolize 'truth' claims and punish those who are defiant.

President on Twitter: Implications for contemporary politics and political discourse

The discussion about power signals critical issues in our understanding and assessment of presidents on Twitters. The following discussion builds on the understanding of power to examine the practices of presidents on Twitter and the implications on politics. In an interview on 'the art of being a president on Twitter' (Collins, 2013), Kagame posits that Twitter is a very important tool to him. In his tweets he also emphasizes the importance of Twitter in strengthening citizen participation and as a knowledge-sharing platform. In fact, some will argue that the presence of the president on Twitter gives the everyday use of Twitter among their citizens more legitimacy because through this medium, citizens can interact with the president at a personal level. One interesting example is a tweet from Mutabazi, who after a long disputed debate with Kagame wrote, 'Appreciate u taking your time, not many leaders can do that' (2011c). Based on his Twitter discourses, Mutabazi is clearly not a fan of Kagame, nor does he agree with what Kagame says and yet he appreciates the fact that the president takes time to make himself available for debate. This example is interesting because, in the midst of the antagonism, a Twitter user is still able to pinpoint and appreciate the fact that the president took time to respond to his/her view. This could explain why 'the art of being a president on Twitter' is appealing in this era.

Political communication is increasingly about building a reputation through imitating specific lifestyles – usually celebrity lifestyles. Museveni, for example,

tweeted pictures of himself with Barcelona Football Club delegates. In another tweet, Museveni shared a picture of himself juggling a football in the middle of a public road in Kampala and the caption reads 'I had a light moment when I met a group of young boys on my way from Makindye. I showed off my footballing skills.' (2015a). These tweets are a form of self-representation. They attempt to show the 'other side of the president' that people do not see often. It is arguable that this follows some popular trend among celebrities.

Indeed, a tweeting president is not only trendy he is also politically affective to the extent that even his critics will forget that it is the president's duty to respond to needs/issues raised by citizens. This illustrates how Twitter becomes a tool for impression management (Dahlgren, 2009). The real challenge with this is that it invites the audience to pay more attention to the lifestyle of the president at the expense of political discourse. At issue here is how the president's lifestyle affects engagement with him. As a celebrity, the president will appeal to the public through style and emotions. For Cheryl Hall, the issue is the trouble with passion. Her interest is how the influence of a 'charismatic leader' or star could 'sway people into doing things they would not' (2011:14). However, John Corner posits that 'ordinary people' do in fact recognize that the representation of ordinary life in the media is frequently subject to politically oriented distortion' (2011:104), he wonders why people do not reject or protest against this kind of representation. As a political figure, people would expect the president to prioritize debate and deliberation on key issues.

Corner's observation on whether the audience understands the primary communicative purpose (of the president's tweets) as either neutral information or persuasion (2011:136) is also vital. This is important because while neutral information can be seen as an invitation for people to freely participate in a debate through expressing their own reasons, opinions or judgment, persuasion does not. Carpentier uses Foss and Griffin's (1995) contrast of invitation and persuasion to argue that according to these authors, persuasion thrives on the 'desire for control and domination' (2012:172). This view observes and critiques the power structures and relations that embody participation in contemporary political spheres. Firstly, while the invitation to participate has positive connotations like creating more avenues for public participation, it also shows that the president is in a privileged position that gives him power to invite or discourage participation. Secondly, when the presidents invite others to participate in one conversation (or way) instead of another this could be viewed as a form of control. The Twitter discourses show mixed reactions to the presidents' tweets, with some arguing that

the president's tweets are a form of persuasion. Take this Twitter conversation for example:

Museveni: Uganda's economy has expanded from US\$ 1.5 billion in 1986 to now almost US\$ 28 billion. (2014c)

Okech John: @KagutaMuseveni thats why we dont want you to retire (2014)

Dave Bik: @KagutaMuseveni Incorrect. Uganda's GDP in 1986 was approx US\$3.5bn. It is now approx US\$22bn. (2015)

Museveni is found of using 1986 (when he took power) as a point of reference to demonstrate his regime's achievements. And as we see in this example, Okech seems to believe that the president is providing neutral information and yet Dave attempts to prove the president wrong. Corner's concern on whether the audience understands the primary communicative purpose is more inclined to the ethical implications of persuasion as a form of 'organized lie' and how this 'bad politics' (propaganda) becomes a discourse of power (2011:137). Unlike closed presidential public addresses through the mainstream media, Twitter provides more opportunities for citizens to challenge the hegemony, albeit citizens must be empowered or well informed to identify these 'organized lies'.

In the worst-case scenario, this struggle for hegemony (among the political elite) creates even more dilemmas for democracy. Contemporary political discourse on Twitter is increasingly plastered with hate. A spirited Twitter conversation between Ian Birrell, a former deputy editor of the Independent, and Paul Kagame in 2011 is a good example:

Birrell: No-one in media, UN or human rights groups has the moral right to criticise me, says despotic & deluded @PaulKagame <http://on.ft.com/kflyia> (2011)

Kagame: @ianbirrell. Not you either...no moral right! You give yourself the right to abuse ppl and judge them like you r the one to decide (2011a)

While enthusiasts of agonistic pluralism (see e.g. Mouffe, 2005) will argue that conflict is healthy for democracy, deliberative democracy does not seem to profit much from this kind of antagonism. In fact, 'the public sphere degenerates when political debate, for example, gets locked into pie-throwing and name-calling' (Dahlgren, 2009:91). Moreover, unlike Habermas who is adamant that

deliberation should fully be based on reason, Dahlgren seems to sympathize with the agonistic model – arguing that discursive possibilities can still emerge through these hate-ridden conversations. Yet, Fairclough makes a postmodern observation that politics is changing and it is potentially a crisis. ‘Some people see it as the political being squeezed out of contemporary social life. Others see it more as a partial relocation of the political.’ (quoted in Bell and Garrett, 1998:146). The issue is two fold, on one hand the presidents try to control how people discuss issues (van Dijk, 2008:91) through promoting hegemony albeit amidst a struggle and on the other the struggle creates fewer opportunities for deliberation and more antagonism. After a series of heated disagreements, in one Twitter conversation Mutabazi tweets to Kagame saying, ‘I know you blocked me and can’t read this, but you’re less than honest in your interview’ (2011b). One of the biggest fouls with African democracy is that politicians often use persuasion and political power to solve (censor) the seemingly irreconcilable differences with their critiques.

The notion of participation and its supposedly democratic nature becomes compromised when politicians use political power, censorship and persuasion to control and dominate conversations and society. Take the discourses on Pan Africanism as an example, Kenyatta’s tweet ‘Africa must start looking inwards for solutions’ (2015a), which literally communicates to every African. This call for collective action seems to suggest that every African has a role to play. In reality Africans can only fully emancipate themselves if they work closely with their leaders and vice versa. And yet, as the responses show, trust between the leaders and the people is by and large deficient. One response reads ‘@UKenyatta Mr. President, we look upto them with hope for we dont trust in you 'African Leaders'. Make us trust in you. we just can't’ (Ododo, 2015). The International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted Uhuru Kenyatta in 2011 for allegedly supporting the 2007/8 election violence in Kenya (ICC, 2015). Although Kenyatta was not president at the time, there has been a growing concern among African leaders that this Hague based court selectively targets them. In January 2016, Kenyatta tweeted calling on the African Union to withdraw from the ICC. Yet, some Africans believe that these leaders are only using that claim to discredit the ICC and evade the possibility of ever being indicted.

While the lack of trust in this case seems to work in favour of democracy (Dahlgren, 2009:114), there might be equal chances that democracy loses out on implementing ideas that would potentially benefit society simply because people do not trust the president. One way to nurse that trust is through responding to critics. Moreover, not all responses increase the intensity of the debate. In fact, a critical review of Kagame’s tweets found that many of his responses to others are

‘thank you’ tweets that seem to end the conversation instead of inviting more debate. Any prospect for dialogue to take shape seems to be dependent on whether or not the president responds to others and how he responds. Fairclough argues that the aim of some discursive practices is to sustain unequal power relations (1989:85).

Dahlgren posits, ‘the web [...] is partly a result of policies pursued by various stakeholders – and could [...] be politically altered’ (2013:34). This is an issue of power, which could be exercised either directly (in form of bans and regulation) or indirectly through limiting engagement. For instance, in February 2016, the government of Uganda issued a derivative ordering all Internet service providers to block access to social networking platforms. During a press release, the president commented on this controversial ban saying that this was a security measure – to prevent people from inciting violence on the national Election Day. While issues of national security are important, such a blockage undermines the authenticity of digital democracy and renders its existence to the mercy of the regime.

It is also arguable that the growing concerns about surveillance and online restrictions in countries like Kenya and Uganda show that these governments are fully aware of the power of these tools. Therefore, the fact that the presidents (and other institutions) are participating in Twitter conversations makes the platform more vulnerable to macro-political power (Corner, 2011). For example, in 2014, Robert Alai, a Kenyan blogger, was arrested for ‘undermining the presidency on Twitter’ after he posted a tweet describing Kenyatta as an ‘adolescent president’ and he also shared the president’s phone number. Although Africa’s digital political sphere seems to be vibrant and indeed creating alternative avenues for people to engage their leaders and participate in political discourse, the growing level of online surveillance and crackdown on bloggers further constrain the political sphere.

Understanding East Africa’s political sphere through Twitter discourses

The final note on implications of having a President on Twitter for contemporary politics is a concern for globalization of politics. One of the expectations that come with regional integration is that citizens get more engaged in cross border politics. Indeed, Twitter is already making this possible. Moreover, Held observes that since human activity is increasingly ‘organized on a regional or global level, the fate of democracy, and of the independent democratic nation-state in particular, is fraught with difficulty’ (2006:292). The East African Community (EAC) comprises of six member states, namely Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan,

Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Although the EAC pack has made some major progress on economic fronts, the depth of political ties is still wanting. Part of the problem can be elaborated by the fact that the efficacy of democracy in each of these countries appears to be questionable. From the raging civil unrest in Burundi and South Sudan to the issue of president for life (in Uganda, for instance), regional politics is grappling with conflicts. Among other things, these conflicts affect how the civil society operates within nation-state and how it engages others at regional level. But above all, since each of these countries has a unique political history, some of which are very violent and on-going, the struggle for hegemony becomes an on-going project and among the citizens this means more antagonism. The discussion above has already shown evidence of conflicts among citizens.

Beyond East Africa, these three presidents have openly criticized the west – arguing that they (the West) ‘Talk about democracy & all kinds of freedom – rightly so. Yet the same people are the ones denying others their freedoms by deciding for them’ (Kagame, 2012). Although this anti-west discourse reflects the need for Africans to emancipate themselves, the presidents often use it to evade the burden of being accountable to the international community and to justify their personal agendas. Giddens’ observation that ‘the ethos of self-growth signals major social transitions in late modernity’ (1991:209-215) further elaborated this point. He argues that self-growth could either lean towards emancipatory politics (liberating people from exploitation) or life politics (morally justifiable forms of life). With the knowledge that many African leaders use their political power to shield themselves from accountability and prosecution, it becomes imperative to consider the possibility that perhaps these presidents are tarnishing the west and the International Criminal Court to fulfil their personal agenda of evading justice.

A review of Museveni, Kagame and Kenyatta’s Twitter discourses reveals the fluidity of the politics of the East African region – where social, political and economic issues overlap. This stresses that the political is naturally borderless and any attempt to confine it within rigid borders of a nation-state or institution is more bound to fail than succeed. It is very common (and normal) for citizens of one country to engage the president of another (neighbouring) country in debate through Twitter – as we have seen in the discourses above. But, it is important to note that although the politics of the region and social-economic issues are more or less the same, the values and norms that bind the participatory cultures are distinctive. This could explain why Rwandans on Twitter are more likely to agree with their president than disagree with him – unlike the case of Uganda and Kenya. As the analysis above has indicated, historical events can yield control,

which then determines how people use the media. Moreover, such control has been widely criticized and in the case of Rwanda, it has been used to question the legitimacy of the country's democracy albeit many critics end up torn between sympathizing with the discourse of 'new Rwanda' in contrast with the country's horrendous history.

One interesting development, that probably requires more attention is the growing number of public institutions on Twitter in Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda. While this development can be attributed to a number of social and technological forces, it is certainly undeniable that the political power of a tweeting president motivates or challenges other public institutions to use the platform. In Kenya, for instance, the vice president is also quite active on Twitter. In Rwanda, the Office of the President and other government ministries are very active on Twitter and the president interacts with them through the platform regularly.

Above all, the discourses also show that most of the political discussions on Twitter emerge from initiatives that the individuals (citizens) take – for instance, the issues they choose to tweet about, who they tweet, how they interpret tweets, how they use hashtags to amplify their voices and whether they choose to engage in politics of neighbouring countries or not. All these issues contribute to the intensity of political discourses on the platform. And since people can directly tweet the president, this also means that there are more opportunities that the usually taken-for-grant political issues will gain more significance as 'people become self-conscious' (Fairclough, 1989:106). In fact, Kenyans and Ugandans on Twitter are known to complement each other to challenge and thwart the political power of their presidents. The most recent example of this collaboration is what happened when Uhuru Kenyatta posted a message congratulating Museveni on winning the highly contested 2016 presidential elections. Kenyans used the hashtag #UhuruIsNotKenya to disown Kenyatta's congratulatory message to Museveni:

Okeyo: How does uhuru puport to congratulate Museveni on behalf of Kenyans for this sham of an election? [#UhuruIsNotKenya](#) (2015)

Njuru: Dear Ugandans, we are sorry. [#UhuruIsNotKenya](#). He is just a milk businessman looking for market in your country. (2016)

This exemplifies how ordinary citizens can use discourse to recapture the narrative and according to Fairclough, this 'could lead to the power relations being challenged or questioned'(1989:85). Among other things, this collaboration

seems to show that Twitter is presenting more opportunities for a reconciled civil society among citizens of these two states.

Conclusions

This thesis set out to understand how Presidents – Paul Kagame, Uhuru Kenyatta and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni – use Twitter to engage the public in debate and whether their participation in political discourses through Twitter boosts everyday civic engagement through digital media. Building on theoretical perspectives on participation and the public sphere, the thesis then assessed the implications of ‘presidents on Twitter’ on democracy and the order of contemporary discourse in Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda. First, this thesis has argued that understanding whether the president really tweets or not is important. This is important for two reasons; first, to the subjective character of audiences when engaging or interacting with others and second, to the issue of getting heard by the intended person or audience. So, it is arguable that knowing whether the president tweets or not could contribute to the degree and intensity of engagement (Dahlgren, 2009). Whether Kagame and Kenyatta tweet for themselves remains unresolved but it seems to be certain that Museveni’s Twitter account is managed by someone else. Moreover, as the discourses have shown that people will engage with the president’s Twitter account regardless of whether he tweets for himself or not as long as his is active and Twitter verified.

This research took the position that Twitter can only afford citizens a meaningful political debate if the president uses Twitter as a conversational platform. Yet, this study has established that Museveni and Kenyatta barely respond to tweets from other users. This does not mean that the duo does not engage others in debate but it definitely shows a very low intensity of engagement with the general public in debate. Kagame on the other hand often responds to others.. And this could explain why he can be viewed as the most controversial of the three based on the discourses he engages in and how he responds to others. Yet, further analysis of Kagame’s responses to others also found that many of his responses were acknowledgement (‘thank you’) tweets. Thank you tweets can motivate further engagement but can equally discourage engagement.

Furthermore, the study has revealed that some of the discourses the presidents participate in through Twitter are not related to politics at all. Some of the discourses could have more to do with the president’s personal interests or popular

culture and yet, this has been particularly observed to increase opportunities for the political to emerge instead of hindering it. Also, the fact that the president participates in a varied range of topics invites and creates more windows of opportunity for others to engage him. If we view this as a tactic employed by the president to seek public attention, then the issue is that the president gains a certain level of control in terms of setting conditions for what to discuss. However, the public is actively engaged in those discourses – which means they are not passively following the president's lead. The public has the ability to make meaning out of discourses and change course of the conversation to suit their preferences. For instance, the discussion about the president's fantasy for football club quickly turned into a heated discourse on presidential term limits.

Consequently, the range of issues that people and the president can discuss on Twitter is barely limited. However, this cannot be fully attributed to the fact that the president is on Twitter because the initiatives citizens take to tweet the president, reply and even challenge the hegemony have been observed to be crucial in highlighting the critical issues and yielding more affective political engagement with the president and among the public. Among other things, this shows that the presence of the presidents on Twitter does not necessarily guarantee that he will engage the public in debate. The example of Kones' tweet to Kagame and the debate that ensued between Kenyans and Rwandans on Twitter vividly corroborates this point. Moreover, issues such as access, empowerment and other social factors of power can affect how people engage the president in conversations about issues that are pertinent their social and political life.

Although social media platforms are generally perceived to be laissez-faire and mostly democratic in participatory terms, issues of power – social, political, discursive, communicative power – can delimit the level of engagement and vibrancy of the debates on Twitter. Analysis of the tweets by the presidents seems to show more evidence of minimalist modes of engagement where dialogue is by and large lacking. Where dialogue with the president seems to be taking place, it is either short-lived or entangled in power struggles. To this, we can add the growing concern about prosecution of bloggers, online surveillance and social media bans. This not only affirms that Twitter remains an alternative political sphere, it also shows that deliberation through platforms like Twitter can easily be distorted and perhaps no level of ethics or responsibility can stop the occurrence of such. For instance, Mutabaazi, one of Kagame's critics tweeted to appreciate that the president takes time to respond to him despite their differences and yet, as Mutabazi alleged, Kagame eventually blocked him.

While the presence of a president on Twitter presents new opportunities for individuals to engage the head of state directly and almost in real-time, in reality this phenomenon might have minimal or no influence at all on decision-making processes. This observation does not mean to downplay the perceived power of social media; rather, it stresses that institutionalized politics treasures representational models where decisions are often made by a few political elites behind closed doors. Therefore, even though the president uses a media platform that ordinary people do, the discourses still show him as a powerful person with decision-making power. Therefore, we should as well be open to the possibility that the president is putting up a political performance on Twitter and that his Twitter rhetoric may not necessarily reflect reality.

If the presidents really use Twitter for impression management and to set conditions for debate, then the phenomenon of 'president on Twitter' and its democratic claim require more scrutiny. As the discourses have shown, the president could potentially use the notion of participation to legitimize his claim for democracy although the whole process and intentions are flawed. The discourses have revealed how the struggle for hegemony tends to restrict what people talk about and how. In Rwanda for example, the topic of the genocide remains widely a single story and the government has used this discourse to further curtail the media. But the hegemony does not stop spirited conversations that scrutinize and challenge the hegemony. The fact that the president is willing to come face-to-face with critics on Twitter, knowing that this gives the issue more visibility can be viewed as a way to promote hegemony and yet, the fact that the president is willing to openly participate in such discussions shows that he is making himself available for debate. That exemplifies democratic traits.

Moreover, in countries with authoritarian regimes, the presence of the president on Twitter can be seen as a mechanism of control and surveillance on online spheres. This means that people will neither freely engage the president on pertinent issues, they will also be aware that they are potentially 'being watched'. For those who view the web as an alternative political sphere, this is a setback. Twitter deliberation with the president can only be meaningful if the general public feels comfortable and are free to engage the president in other spheres of life especially in spirited political debates.

Above all, this thesis has also argued that the budding trend of 'presidents on Twitter' has very serious implications on the democratization process. First of all, this trend has been viewed through the lens of celebrity politics and its emotionally affective nature. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it helps to improve on the increasingly tarnished reputation of the politician and this could

help one of the dilemmas of democracy through increasing political participation. This is particularly important for African politics since the reputation of many presidents is quite bad and yet Africa is home for the world's youngest population. Political theorists have observed that a tarnished reputation of a leader is known to repel political engagement and that political participation among young people is increasingly very low. On the other it could jeopardize the whole democratization process if people choose passion instead of reason in their approach to political issues. Part of the problem here is linked to whether the public takes the responsibility of understanding the primary communicative purpose of the president's tweets, which could either be neutral information or persuasion.

One of the critical observations that this study has made is what becomes of the public sphere when political discourse turns into name-calling (politics of hate). It is important to note that this argument fully observes that identity politics is vital for democracy but as the discourses have shown, sometimes Twitter discourses can escalate into almost irreconcilable antagonism. The discourses further show how presidential political power swings in causing adverse effects on the functioning of the Twittersphere. This implies that the *laissez-faire* character of Twitter deteriorates due to increased government control. For many African countries where the mainstream media remain by and large controlled by the state and constantly under surveillance, curtailing digital media means more public participation deficits in political discourse.

The final observation is a reflection on the fate for democracy under the tide of growing global and regional integration. In this digital age, the opportunities for citizens to engage in cross-border politics through social media are limitless and yet the discourses have shown a mixed bag of challenges and opportunities. The issue of citizenship as a condition to participate has been highlighted. The problem with this is that the notion of citizenship obscures reason and delegitimizes participation of the other. This not only affects participation of individuals, it could also impede the realization of a united and reconciled civil society among member states. Moreover, this civil society can only make a meaningful contribution to the democratization process if the issue of hospitality and responsibility (Silverstone, 2013) to the other are observed in contemporary communicative spaces.

Beyond the 'newness' of Twitter, we would be naïve to view presidents on Twitter as a totally new phenomenon. This is because this trend seems to be a reenactment of classical examples such as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who used radio to inform and influence the American public in the late 1930s. Therefore, future

research in practices that are perceived to be motivated by new media and communication tools should not get caught up in the 'newness' but strive to understand how the social, political and historical perspectives affect use of media in contemporary society (Dahlgren, 2009:160-161). The growing trend of presidents on Twitter also requires more country specific research to fully grasp how the president uses Twitter, for what purposes, for whose benefit and what is at stake. This will broaden our understanding of the role of media in contemporary politics.

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Appendix A: Code book

FORMAL	INFORMAL	Acknowledgement
Opinion by President Kagame in the East African: "A strong East African Union is in sight; 130m people are watching" http://bit.ly/5VPdFR	Hello #Rwanda - Paul Kagame is now on Twitter.	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 1 Jan 2011 @ndagrat2 Thank u, cheers,dukomeze aho!
President Kagame chairs 7th National Dialogue 10-11 Dec, watch live at: www.umushyikirano.gov.rw	Paul Kagame - The 2009 TIME 100 - http://bit.ly/uhdRK	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Jan 2011 @catsive Cheers,Happy New Year!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 27 Sep 2011 I was amused by the fone-hacking saga that almost tore apart Britain! The politicians,the police,the jrnalists,the whistleblower(found dead)	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 Thank u for encouragement @MissAnge_K ,sure u will see many more,won't stop...Love u daughter!!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Jan 2011 @LeonofLeon thank you ...happy New Year
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 27 Sep 2011 Hello,I have been thinking to myself that I have broken a promise,which isn't my habit-I haven't been on twitter for a while...	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 19 Dec 2011 To All followers,I wish you a Merry Christmas and a very Happy and prosperous New Year 2012!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Jan 2011 @moshXL . Yess I am the person-the president!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 8 Mar 2012 Recognizing Rwandan women for their indispensable contribution(as well their right) to our country's development!!# Women's Int'l Day Bravo	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 13 Feb 2012 Congratulations Zambia's soccer team/Chipolopolo- for a well earned and well deserved victory-CAN-2012! Resilience personified in the team!!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Jan 2011 @nanciellah thank u,yes I do!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 6 Apr 2012 A generation born in the pain and sadness of genocide reaches maturity in a dignified #Rwanda that has itself come of age. #RwandaRemembers18	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 11 Oct 2012 Have a good night..!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 4 Jan 2011 @erikaliles Happy New n thanks for RT n your thots/ideas! My salutations to Kevin as well...!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Dec 2012 For fdlr(genocidaires) who are causing death n destruction in Congo n Rw's border area,u have got away with it for too long...has to stop!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 23 Oct 2012 Can't be happier&more grateful with all these God-blessed-people wishing me well for my BirthDay-thanks!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 @sarablask thank u ..!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 1 Jan 2013 Happy New Year! Rwanda is on the right path and in 2013 we will remain focused, energised and determined to achieve our full potential.	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 24 Dec 2012 I want to wish everyone-esp those who wished my family and I too- The best of everything during Xmas time & prosperous New Year!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 @tmsrue Agree with you ...!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 1 Jan 2011 @SOMALICHIEF Thank u,I and all Rwandans feel for Somalis and hope 2011 brings the change u are looking for...!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Feb 2013 Looking forward to watching #Nigeria vs #Burkinafaso this Sunday, two great African nations and promising teams. #AFCON2013	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 @Rarin Right,thank u
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Jan 2011 @JohnFMoore more effective decentralisation,more access to info.n	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 5 Jan 2011 @Reagzd2 True I bzy person bcz I am of the time dealing with pple and challenges-	Uhuru Kenvatta @UKenvatta Feb 2

commnctn tools to citizens. Strengthen national dialogue,build capacity..	twitter comes right in between n comes handy...! Thx	Happy Birthday @SakaiaJohnson
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Jan 2011 @JohnFMoore . Build on more participation n ideas that flow in the system...for more efficiency n productivity as we ve seen in Doing bizness..	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 @normzo how wud u like to be convinced that I am personally tweeting...? Be convinced I wudnt deceive or allow some1 to do it on my behalf!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 12 Mar 2011 @muqireje . I am there ...thank u ..
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 @kabbz If u can think so n u r right about democracy vs pres.4 life,why think it s dfclt for others ..n to do what is right!??	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 @archforhumanity yes I am arsenal fan n Ray is my friend,thanks!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 23 Oct 2011 @carolinekere . Merci,thanks so much n a very happy day to you too!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 26 Jan 2011 @kabbz . U mean provoking some argument,raising an opinion n things like that-u r right-I will be with u on that again soon,thx!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 28 Jan 2011 @iodyssee Thank u,btw are the one I have seen on some progrm on cnn ...?	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 23 Oct 2011 @anangweCFM . Happy arsenal won ...thanks
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 1 Feb 2011 @Natabaalo from almost nothing,a decade n half ago to 70 local newspapers n 2 dozen fm radios n free flow of foreign media i dont ..	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 11 Jul 2011 @carolinekere . Greetings to you too! My sunday was vgood thank you! Honestly,not too spiritual...!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 22 Dec 2012 @RBD II you are welcome !
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 28 Mar 2011 @EdouardMutabazi . Think mutabazi has a problem-of not being in touch with matters on the ground in his country(if he thinks it s)!!!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 11 Oct 2011 @Ritararenga1 give her my greetings back-I am happy for her! Thank you	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 25 Dec 2012 @rusanganwaj . Urakoze! Nawe nabawe...imigisha!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 28 Mar 2011 @sheikanas . Think better to ignore @Edouardmutabazi .dsnt deserve the attention he s seeking...!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 23 Oct 2011 @Ektona Happy Birthday to you and your brother too-thank you for the good wishes!!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 11 Apr 2013 @KoinangeJeff . How are you Jeff ? Thanks
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 14 May 2011 @ianbirrell . Is that all u kno about Rw? No need to explain to u anythg? Ask your own govt/leaders to explain to u those same things...	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 23 Oct 2011 @JoelMUGABE . Morning to you ...!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 25 Apr 2013 @CohenGahire . It goes without saying that you are truly appreciated...!!
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 14 May 2011 @ianbirrell In Rw.we hold ourselves and each accountable indeed to a high level and even deal with criticism honestly,openly and fairly..!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 20 Nov 2011 @LucyMbabazi . I am quite well thank you,hope you fine too,and bless you too	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 27 Aug 2011 @RwandaFarmers . I will have our min.of Agric.address whatever problem there may be-soonest!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 28 Nov 2011 @carolinekere . You are very welcome to do that...thank you! Hope you are well!	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 29 Sep 2011 @Vishal_PwC . I haven't met a real partner in terms of govts-I have seen many in terms of bizness companies!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 13 Dec 2011 @GeraldBahenda . My day is great ...how is yours-thank you	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Oct 2011 @JacobMpaka . I would talk about the two separately: over-staying in power and the African problem! But tell us your own view first!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 13 Dec 2011 @carolinekere . For you happy holidays too! Thank you	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 1 Feb 2012	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 11 Jan 2012	

@JohnFMoore . In the end Rws.shd be one to judge...if there is any posturing as claimed by the likes from afar,they would be 1s to know 1 st	@PABLO_KenKimuli . I also enjoyed your great humour!! Hope you had good festive days. Thank you !!	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 26 Jan 2012 @MCXIMCXI . I am sure pple can change things without having to leave...talk was about having to change...!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 22 Jan 2012 @Etalephil . I very much support arsenal-but to be honest Wenger needs to coach another team now and Arsenal needs another Coach for +ve ...	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Oct 2012 @innercitypress . The whole history of UN in/with Rwanda has been disastrous-has to change!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 2 Feb 2012 @_EightBall . Wont be saying anything again-not to be misunderstood/misrepresented again! Just want to be a supportive/appreciative fan!	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 11 Oct 2012 Talk about democracy&all kinds of freedom-rightly so. Yet the same pple are the ones denying others their freedoms by deciding fr them..	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 26 May 2012 @Murukakays . Good or bad,yes I do drive myself many times including in motorcade!!	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 8 Dec 2012 Can't be put better than in http://www.huffingtonpost.com_by Georgianne : Is Rw,the victim in a modern day Salem witch trial??? So true!	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 3 Aug 2012 @LenineJ . Sure -when will you be here,in Rwanda...?? Will look for you to have a game!	
Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 1 Jan 2013 Happy New Year! Rwanda is on the right path and in 2013 we will remain focused, energised and determined to achieve our full potential.	Paul Kagame @PaulKagame 7 Jan 2011 @Ektona yess btw I did watch arsenal,was a good game arsenal sh have won that 1 but ...??? They have a gr8 game but need to score ..	
Yoweri K Museveni @KagutaMuseveni 24 Apr 2014 I send my first tweet to salute Ugandan science students; they modified this vehicle's engine to run on pure ethanol.	Yoweri K Museveni @KagutaMuseveni 26 Apr 2014 I salute Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Kambarage for his contribution to the formation of the United Republic of Tanzania	
Yoweri K Museveni @KagutaMuseveni 26 Apr 2014 I thank you for welcoming me to Twitter. I will interact with you, and take questions, every two weeks.	Yoweri K Museveni @KagutaMuseveni 29 Jun 2014 When I learnt of Ivan's participation, I said let him go. The Bible says, "...by their fruits you will know them."	
Uhuru Kenyatta @UKenyatta Jan 31 We refuse to be carried along in a vehicle that has strayed off-course to the detriment of our sovereignty, security & dignity as Africans.	Yoweri K Museveni @KagutaMuseveni 29 Jun 2014 Best wishes to Muslims in Uganda and around the world. Ramadhan is a month of virtue and self-reflection. Ramadhan Kareem.	
Uhuru Kenyatta @UKenyatta Jan 31 In this regard I have called on the AU to include a new mandate to develop a roadmap for withdrawal from the Rome Statute as necessary.	Uhuru Kenyatta @UKenyatta Feb 3 It is with deep sorrow that we've learnt of the death of Mbogo Murage. His death has robbed us of a friend, colleague & a great journalist	
Uhuru Kenyatta @UKenyatta Jan 31 We are also in the midst of playing our part in mediating multiple peace processes in our region.		
Uhuru Kenyatta @UKenyatta Jan 30 We held bilateral talks that revolved around trade between Kenya and Namibia.		

Appendix B

The table below shows a summary of the Twitonomy analytics for the three presidents over a given period of time:

Table 2:

Summary of Twitonomy Tweet analytics report for 3 presidents

PRESIDENT'SNAME	REPORT PERIOD	TOTAL OF TWEETS ANALYSED	TWEETS ARE RETWEETS	TWEETS ARE REPLIES
Kagame	May 15, 2009 – Feb 23, 2016	2553	02	2078
Museveni	April 24, 2014 - Feb 23, 2016	1339	08	32
Kenyatta	Dec 11, 2010 - Feb 23, 2016	2984	338	31

According to the Twitonomy website, a high number of ‘retweets’ and ‘replies’ shows that the user (in this case the president) interacts more with others. Based on this understanding, this data suggests that Kagame interacts more with other Twitter users compared to his two counterparts. But, what is not clear is whether the same can be said for Museveni and Kenyatta given the fact that they have a very small number of replies and retweets. Based on the total number of interactions (retweets and replies), Kenyatta definitely interacts more with other Twitter users than Museveni.

The data in Table 2 above shows that out of 2,553 tweets by Kagame, 2,078 were replies to other users compared to Museveni who had only 32 replies out of 1339 tweets and Kenyatta with 31 replies out of 2984 tweets. This shows that Kagame actively replies to tweets by other users. Museveni and Kenyatta on the other hand barely reply to tweets. Yet, Kenyatta who has the least number of replies leads on retweets - with 338 retweets compared to Museveni and Kagame who registered 08 and 02 retweets respectively. If we view Twitter as a platform that supports multiple modes of interaction and the fact that these presidents tweet regularly (1 tweet per day on average), reply to tweets and even retweet others, it is easy to conclude that they engage the public in debate albeit with varying degrees of engagement.

Changing the World through Consumption

The contradictions of political engagement in the case of Oatly

Ally McCrow-Young

Introduction

‘We’re faced with making real changes every day, our movement is consumption. Changing consumption will save lives.’ (Daniel, Oatly consumer)

How much can a carton of oat milk change the world? When Swedish oat milk producer Oatly was sued by the dairy lobby in 2014 for their use of marketing slogans such as ‘It’s like milk, but made for humans’, an intense public debate erupted across mainstream media and social media. Facebook and Twitter became the front line in a fight between those who supported Oatly for their ethical and sustainable stance over food production, and those who saw Oatly’s marketing slogans as an attack on traditions and primary industry. Oatly supporters were moved to start Twitter campaigns, write opinion articles and create a myriad of fan pages on social media in defence of Oatly. What these activities reveal is the highly politicised nature of consumer products, and the outpouring of support from Oatly consumers showed a new yet contradictory form of political engagement, where changing the world can be achieved across multiple everyday spaces through digital media, supermarkets and homes.

This widespread online and offline reaction of Oatly supporters illustrates a shifting, unconventional kind of political engagement through commodity activism (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012) enhanced by digital media.

Commodity activism aligns personal purchasing habits with social and political change, situating change with individual consumer action. Running parallel to this, corporations are constantly adjusting their strategies to foster consumer engagement with their brand based on these very connections to personal politics and lifestyle, as Oatly's creative director notes, 'everything is political.'¹⁰ This is an individual political engagement that is inextricably linked with commodity culture and digital media, blurring the roles of consumers and activists, and raising important questions over the validity of this kind of engagement for both individual and collective action which this thesis seeks to investigate.

Recent research has begun to examine 'commodity activism' as a way of doing politics within brand culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012), as well as 'political consumerism' (e.g. Baek, 2010) which aligns individual purchasing habits with political and social change. These analyses largely focus on the US context and little research has been dedicated to the emerging consumer awareness and demand for sustainable food products as a form of political engagement in the Swedish context. Research into commodity activism has also tended to focus on consumption as political engagement as an isolated practice, rather than seeing how it fits into dynamic, multi-site political engagement and the role of digital media.

Situating political engagement like this within a market setting creates a sense of unease, raising issues over the tension between corporate interests and public participation. Exploring the power dynamics of the relationship between Oatly and their consumers allows for a closer examination of what this kind of political engagement means for individuals, as well as understanding the value of commodity activism for collective social action. Rather than seeing this kind of political engagement in binary terms as either exploitative (e.g. Roff, 2007; Shreck, 2005) or overly celebratory (e.g. Schor, 2007) as previous research has tended to do, this thesis offers a useful case to examine and re-think modes of political engagement and resistance, looking at the multi-layered and often inconsistent patterns of consumer interventions. It posits that individuals within this situated neoliberal context work in many different ways to activate their political selves, operating within capitalist structures, and often critiquing from the inside.

¹⁰ Interview, John Schoolcraft, 2016

Aim and research questions

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore political engagement that is located within a corporate environment. It addresses the multiple spaces where this engagement occurs to analyse the complexity of online and offline commodity activism. Through in-depth interviews with both Oatly consumers and employees the thesis looks at how both parties articulate their engagement with one another, in order to examine the power that structures these kinds of corporate/consumer relationships. The way these relationships are understood has implications for how spaces for personal and collective political engagement are conceived, and where these collide with spaces of corporate control. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do consumers navigate their own political values within the commercial setting of Oatly's brand?
2. What does the relationship between Oatly and their consumers reveal about the value of commodity activism for individual and collective political engagement?
3. In what ways can digital media facilitate political engagement through consumption?

Background: The milk wars and sustainable consumption

In 2014, Swedish oat milk producer Oatly¹¹ was sued by the dairy lobby LRF Mjölk, a division of Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund (Federation of Swedish Farmers)¹² for their use of marketing slogans such as 'It's like milk, but made for humans' and 'No milk, no soy, no badness' (Gustafsson, 2015). The dairy lobby claimed these slogans painted cow's milk negatively, sparking an intense debate in the media over the health benefits of both kinds of milk and the environment impact of dairy production. Dubbed the 'milk wars' (Lindahl, 2015; Löf, 2015),

¹¹ Oatly was founded in the late 1990's after the development of oat milk at Lund University (www.oatly.se). The company is now the largest producer of plant-milk in Sweden, experiencing rapid growth in the past year of 45% revenue increase, earning around 340 million kronor in revenue for 2015 (Gustafsson, 2015).

¹² Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund (Federation of Swedish Farmers), *LRF*, is a member organisation for the agricultural industry. As a division of this Federation, the Swedish dairy lobby *LRF Mjölk* work to promote cow's milk consumption through public communication and policy change (www.lrf.se)

the public dispute over the benefits and negatives of cow's milk garnered sustained media coverage up until and beyond the court's decision in November 2015.

Although Oatly lost the lawsuit, the company's sales skyrocketed and a passionate and dedicated supporter base was revealed (Pierrou, 2014; Lööf, 2015). Oatly consumers took to social media and news media to express their support for Oatly and their opinions about the dairy industry, the environment and the politics of milk. What these milk wars reflect are the global and local shifts in attitude surrounding sustainable food production and consumption, the instability of the position of cow's milk, and the importance of individual action for political and social change.

During 2014 Oatly re-launched their company as a lifestyle brand following the direction of their newly appointed CEO Toni Petersson (Pritchard, 2014). By revamping their product marketing and creating an active social media presence, they positioned themselves as a value-based brand, linking their new image with an adoption of a political position based on environmental sustainability. Oatly's branding as a value-based company reflects the discussion around environmental issues in Swedish society and worldwide, and points to the central role of sustainable production and consumption. The milk wars between LRF Mjölken and Oatly can be seen as the culmination of several significant global and national conversations around changing attitudes to animal agriculture and its effects on the environment.

How to feed the world in an age of natural resource depletion and environmental degradation has become a major societal problem, making the role of food production companies as well as consumer choices all the more critical (Jackson, 2014). This is reflected for example in the United Nation's global sustainable development goals for 2030¹³ which focus on food production as a key site for environmental impact.¹⁴

The Oatly lawsuit evolved against the backdrop of the global milk crisis, which is linked to these widespread debates on sustainable food, and has seen dairy industries worldwide face increasing strain, with milk prices at their lowest in ten years (Hunt and Tajitsu, 2015; Mikkelsen, 2016). These global environmental

¹³ www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals

¹⁴ Connected to this sustainability shift is the increasing consumer demand for alternative plant-based products. This is based in an acknowledgement of the way food production systems rely on an intensive global animal economy (Wolch and Emel, 1998) which not only affects global concerns for sustainable food production such as issues for the climate and inequality concerns, but also an increasing investment in human health.

issues have lead to the rise of green consumption and the discourse of ‘eating for change’ (Johnston and Cairns, 2012) from both the commodity producer side as well as the consumer side. This dual evolution of the very real environmental threats as well as the strategies employed by both corporations and individuals in response to this, stresses the importance of understanding evolving forms of political engagement based in consumption.

Sweden is a useful site of analysis to look at commodity activism over sustainable food production and consumption, and particularly as a battleground for the milk wars. Consuming cow’s milk is highly normalised in Swedish society, and cow’s milk has enjoyed a distinctly positive image for several decades due to widespread consensus on its wholesomeness as human food (Jönsson, 2013). The debate around the milk wars demonstrates the high symbolic value that is attached to dairy consumption in Sweden, and compared to other animal products, milk seems to bear significance in a special way, as dairy farming is often described as ‘the motor, or navel, of Swedish agriculture’ (Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund, 2016b).

This backdrop of the position of cow’s milk in Swedish society made for an even more controversial debate during the milk wars, and signals the instability within the public discourse of traditional versus alternative milk. The sharp increase in alternative milk consumption¹⁵, and the significant reaction of Oatly supporters in the milk wars highlights a shift in public opinion from the margins into the mainstream. Gaining an insight into the ways individuals are responding to this shift in ideology, and practising their form of political engagement through digital media and consumer products is vital for understanding how commodity activism both reflects and influences social change.

Surveying and synthesising engagement

To understand how the intersecting phenomenon of political engagement through consumption operates it is useful to begin by exploring research on the shifting spaces of political engagement, and the changes noted by researchers on the way individuals do politics in personal, everyday contexts. Research into

¹⁵ The worldwide market for non-dairy milk grew from over \$6bn in 2009 to a projected \$10bn for 2016. Non-dairy milk makes up 24% of all new milk product sales in Europe (Bloomberg, 2015).

consumption as a form of political engagement will help to map out how this practice operates within the context of this case. Following this, an examination of the power struggles which underpin these forms of political engagement such as debates over free labour will help to reveal what spaces are available for consumer resistance to corporate control.

Research into emerging forms of political engagement shows that more and more, people are moving outside of traditional spheres into creative, everyday spaces facilitated by digital media (e.g. Norris, 2002; Van Zoonen, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009). Rather than seeing these activities as an abandonment of individual interest in politics, it highlights the possibilities and entry points to political engagement that are constantly evolving (Dahlgren, 2009:31). Therefore it is helpful to consider the context and implications of alternative avenues of political engagement, evaluating their validity as a form of accessing politics for individuals.

Among these shifting forms of political engagement is a participation connected to consumption. From new food politics (Schweikhardt and Browne, 2001) and political consumerism (Baek, 2010) to commodity activism (Banet-Weiser, 2012), these works draw together social movement, political engagement and media studies to explore the overall shift in forms of political engagement, and the way each of these components interact. Underpinning this research is the role of power in the form of corporate exploitation and individual empowerment, and how this is negotiated by individuals and producers/corporations through forms of labour and resistance.

Beyond binaries of exploiter versus exploited

Not only are the spaces and modes of political engagement shifting, but the strategies employed by corporate interests are both responding and contributing to these shifts. Several scholars interested in these emerging forms of political engagement acknowledge that it is unhelpful to analyse power relations as mere binaries - as one dominant group opposing another submissive group - but instead that relations are highly complex and fluid (Jenkins, 2006; Duffy, 2010; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Johnston and Cairns, 2012). They call for a closer investigation of the interaction of these dynamic and complex power relations, looking specifically at the clash between commercial interests and consumers (Banet-Weiser 2012:13), and the diverse ways individuals engage with politics on a personal level (Bennett, 2012:28).

This clash between top-down power interests and grassroots individual action has been underexplored in existing literature on consumption as political engagement. While Dahlgren acknowledges the necessity for communicative public spaces to enable political talk between citizens (2009:114), Banet-Weiser equally observes that these authentic spaces are now becoming branded spaces (2012: 5). Therefore, exploring the contradictory relationship resulting from these dual agendas from both sides, helps to illuminate who is in control of these spaces, who is excluded, and how individuals make meaning within these contexts.

An interdisciplinary approach to political engagement; one which draws together media studies, social movement and political consumption research, would help to see how this power clash operates between Oatly and their consumers, conceptualising the blurred boundaries between consumers and politically engaged citizens. If we are to move beyond binaries of exploiting versus empowering forms of engagement, we can begin to assess the value of a politics situated within commodity culture and facilitated by digital media. At present, studies of commodity activism and political consumerism have not specifically addressed the hybridity of these spaces of political engagement (e.g. Schweikhardt and Browne, 2001; Yates, 2011). Consumption as political engagement should be explored instead as one aspect of a diverse array of political tools, focusing on how individuals draw on its potential as well as the way digital media can enhance this kind of activism.

Shifting spaces and nature of political engagement

Research has noted that the way we do politics, just like our media consumption, has become highly personalised and its formats have been significantly altered due to neoliberalism and the globalised environment (e.g. Dahlgren, 2009; Corner, 2011; Hands, 2011; Bennett, 2012). These works highlight a 'socio-cultural turbulence' (Dahlgren, 2009: 26), which points to the impact of individualisation on political engagement (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and the shifting landscape of communication networks in both aiding and influencing political engagement (Castells, 2012). This section will begin by mapping out this changing nature of political engagement, looking firstly at the shifting terrains where people access politics, and then at the highly personalised nature of evolving political engagement.

Traditional notions of what political engagement entails have been critiqued for being too narrow, due to a tendency to refer only to engagement with

institutionalised politics. Scholars have argued that these traditional definitions of political engagement do not account for the diversity of individuals' daily lives and engagement with politics that arises from these experiences (e.g. Burns et al., 2001; Walzer, 2004). Similarly, Mouffe's (1999: 754) distinction between 'politics' as organised, traditional structures where politics occur, such as electoral political systems, and 'the political' which can arise anywhere in the social terrain provides a useful stance from which to explore alternative forms of political engagement.

In describing the potential of Mouffe's concept of the political, Dahlgren (2009: 100-1) sees a connection with everyday spaces for accessing and talking about political issues, rather than limiting this talk to formal political institutions. By acknowledging the potential for political engagement to occur in everyday life, and widening traditional definitions, it helps to 'remain open to the possibilities of the political emerging.' (Dahlgren 2009: 100-1). Following these perspectives, this thesis utilises a broader definition of political engagement and 'the political' as one that extends into the daily lives of citizens, acknowledging that political engagement can take many forms outside of formal political spheres, such as homes, schools and workplaces.¹⁶

Political engagement thus takes different shapes in this evolving environment, and politics are encountered and expressed in everyday sites, facilitated by the communicative power of digital media. The rise of a more personalised, individualised (e.g. Bennett, 2012) and dispersed (e.g. Castells, 2012) form of political engagement is a dominant theme throughout this field of research. Scholars see this shift outside of traditional political spheres and its connection to digital media as both positive and negative for political engagement, sparking key debates over the legitimacy of new forms of political engagement.

The evolution of a myriad of digital media forms and Web 2.0 has been well-documented and analysed for its potential to spark cultural and political participation, creativity and enable social movements (see for example, Jenkins,

¹⁶ Dahlgren also distinguishes between political engagement and political participation arguing that engagement is a 'prerequisite for participation', and participation is thus associated with practices, and goes beyond being 'a feeling' (2009:80-81). For my case, both political engagement and political participation are referred to when it comes to discussing the value of commodity activism for individuals. However, following Dahlgren's stance, political engagement is used more frequently in this research as it pertains to a more general interaction with political issues, and not necessarily political activities that follow on from this. The instances where participation is used are thus in reference to specific actions carried out by individuals.

2006; Shirky, 2008; Dahlgren, 2013; Castells, 2012; Olsson and Svensson, 2012; Gauntlett, 2013; Gunning and Zvi Baron, 2014). Several authors discuss the way digital media have collapsed several barriers to participation, arguing that it is now much easier and faster to connect with others across space and time (Thompson, 2005; Castells, 2012; Gauntlett, 2014).

The power of the socially networked space has been recognised for its role in uniting individuals around a common cause, and helping to facilitate and expand social movements such as the Tunisian protests of 2011 and 2012 (see for example, Castells, 2012; White and McAllister, 2014; Zayani, 2015; Onook et al., 2015;). Similarly, emerging practices of creating and sharing have been celebrated as inviting participation through their very format, connecting communities of people and helping to distil complex political issues (Hermes, 2005; Gauntlett, 2011; Dahlgren, 2013). However, there is ongoing disagreement within this academic field between those who laud the promise of Web 2.0 and its participatory elements, versus those who see this view as reductive and over-simplified.

Less optimistic analyses remind us to be wary of overstating the positive effects of Web 2.0 for participation (e.g. Morozov 2009; 2011; Fuchs, 2012). Running parallel to these criticisms of digital media's potential to facilitate political engagement are arguments over the individualistic, shallow nature of these new forms of political participation. Dahlgren (2009; 2011) offers a similarly optimistic perspective to Gauntlett (2011) and Castells (2012) regarding Web 2.0's participatory potential, but at the same time highlights that there could be something negative about the *ease* of this new online engagement. He notes that it may be generating a new kind of political culture where people are reluctant to devote time to a cause, and therefore only contribute a minimum, regardless of the implications to the wider cause (Dahlgren, 2009: 193).

Personalised political engagement: risks and benefits

The criticism over the shallowness of individual political engagement for these new forms is similarly reflected in the body of research on 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism' (e.g. Morozov, 2009; Kristofferson et al, 2014; Štětka and Mazák, 2014; Vie, 2014; Glenn, 2015). These slacktivism debates over the depth of engagement primarily seek to understand whether the overarching social cause is strengthened, and how this fits into traditional notions of political engagement (Christensen, 2012), equating the merits of historical activism such as street rallies, and demonstrations, with this new, easier engagement. Slacktivism is seen as a result of activism via digital media platforms, and connotes negative, shallow

engagement for personal praise rather than to enhance a political cause or democratic process (Morozov, 2009).

Here we see another common thread across media and communication and political engagement research, related to the highly personalised nature of evolving political activism. The most notable discussion is one which looks at the shift away from collective politics and towards an individualised mode of political engagement (Maniates, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Scholars connect individualisation in this environment with consumer culture, where politics instead becomes connected to personal lifestyle rather than collective movements (e.g. Bennett, 1998; Cohen, 2003; Lewis et al., 2005; Cherry, 2006; Haenfler et al., 2012; Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012).

This consumer/citizen dialectic arises from its location within neoliberalism where individual freedom thus emerges through the market rather than the state, influencing relationships and activism which are structured according to this highly individualised mode of being (Harvey, 2005). In this context, individuals become responsible for social and political change through their own actions (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:2), which can equally empower them by allowing them to create a lifestyle 'orientated toward authentic identities and social change' (Haenfler et al., 2012). Coupled with this duality of individual responsibility and empowerment are the opportunities afforded by digital media which enhances personal political action (e.g. Bennett, 2012; Dahlgren, 2013), raising the same debate over individualism as both positive and negative.

Charting the history and development of personalised politics, Bennett (2012) notes that the centrality of the individual today is not necessarily to the detriment of social and political movements. He argues that these debates over individualisation and new communicative technologies are not fruitful and fail to explore the complexities of how individuals themselves combine digital media and political participation (2012:28). Along the same lines, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue for a distinction to be made between the idea of the neoliberal individual operating within the market, and how the concept of individualisation functions for political engagement.

Following these positions, my aim is not to focus in-depth on the two sides of this debate, but rather to use it to contextualise the discussions about emerging forms of activism, and what value these hold for individuals as a form of political engagement. What emerges from these arguments is the need to unpack the complexity of individualism's impact on political engagement for both the wider political cause and also what this means for individuals themselves.

Similarly to Bennett (2012), Gauntlett (2014) makes a case for valuing participation on an individual level, acknowledging the way Web 2.0 technology and the internet help to significantly enhance this personal participation. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) also see this personalisation of political engagement as a good thing, which in fact helps strengthen the communicative outreach of political movements. These bodies of research into the shifting spaces of political engagement show that issues of individualism and weak engagement are important aspects to consider. In the same way, while digital media, particularly social media, can help to facilitate political participation and expression, these scholars remind us that political action is not dependent upon the existence of digital media. Mapping out the central debates within this area is helpful in remembering the implications of evolving modes of political engagement, but also not to overlook how the individual is impacted within specific, nuanced settings.

Political engagement through consumption

One of these settings for political engagement involves political participation through food consumption, which highlights the shifting spaces in which politics is being done. (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012). Consumption practices as well as food itself have become a significant arena for politics and scholars have given this form of political participation several names, such as ‘political consumerism’ (Keum et al., 2004; Stolle et al., 2005; Baek, 2010), ‘commodity activism’ (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012) ‘critical consumption’ (Yates, 2011) and a ‘new politics of food’ (Schweikhardt and Browne, 2001).

While commodity activism looks more broadly at consumption of a variety of consumer goods, not only food consumption, it still operates within the same commercial spaces and raises similar implications and dialectics of situating political engagement within these arenas. Like political consumerism and critical consumption, commodity activism frames individual political engagement within the context of neoliberal commercialism (Banet-Weiser, 2012:18).

Regardless of their labels, these forms of political engagement are all embedded within and reliant upon consumer culture, linking consumption with political change. This body of research into consumption and political engagement raises two main criticisms about this form of political engagement; the effects of individualism and the use of market logics. These debates will be mapped out to assess the value of activism through alternative food, and for seeing how this fits into doing politics across multiple, everyday spaces.

Both Dahlgren and Carpentier stress the importance of everyday contexts where individuals can interact with each other and build opinions with those closest to them (2009: 114-5; 2011: 17-18), thus engaging with politics through everyday consumption can be seen as fruitful for individual participation. This notion is mirrored in Yates' discussion of critical consumption, and its potential for bringing the political into peoples' daily lives, where active food purchasing choices show repeated engagement with social movements (2011:194). Similarly, Haenfler et al. (2012: 6) describe 'lifestyle movements' as being based on making changes to consumption habits through individual action in daily living. Drawing lifestyle into political engagement they argue, encourages individuals to 'integrate movement values into a holistic way of life' (2012: 7).

This new politics of food seeks to use the power of market against itself, to accomplish political change in the food sector and influence social attitudes (Schweikhardt and Browne 2001:302). In doing so, the activities adopt a neoliberal ideology compared to early food movements which sought to work outside of the food system, for example by creating alternative local food production groups¹⁷ (Roff, 2007). This kind of political engagement hinges on individual consumption, and consuming with a purpose, such as promoting supermarket boycotts and campaigning for individuals to buy ethical food (Roff, 2007; Haenfler et al., 2012; Johnston and Cairns, 2012).

The centrality of individual consumer power to these political activities is a common thread across literature on consumption as political engagement. The impact of individual consumer choice and action is seen as positive for its potential to impact companies' production techniques (e.g. Schudson 2006 and 2007), and as a form of resistance (e.g. Lekakis, 2013), but this highly individualised form of activism has also raised concerns for undermining the validity of political movements. Here we see that the notion individualisation is inherently ambivalent, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 3) note, it facilitates social cohesion and cooperation, but it equally increases a sense of individual responsibility.

Individualisation and market logics in food politics

Critics argue that political engagement through consumption is inherently self-centred and thus preferences individual needs over the needs of the collective cause

¹⁷ For example, the counter-food movement during the 1960's in the US aimed to work outside of corporate food systems in a number of ways such as distributing surplus food, and creating community farms and gardens (Roff, 2007:519).

(e.g. Lewis et al., 2005), and equally its ability to inspire communal mobilisation is seen as trumped by personal expression through consumption (Cohen, 2003). Maniates (2001) also notes a shift towards an individualisation of responsibility within the environmental movement, linking political change with individual action. These highly individualised actions, Maniates argues, primarily serve an individual sense of contribution, and do little to connect to the concrete issues of environmental degradation (2001:33). These arguments are similar to those raised within research into digital media and political engagement as mentioned earlier, noting that potential downsides to these kinds of political participation are their weaker structures and focus on the individual.

However, in the same way that horizontal networks through digital media are seen to enhance collective action (Castells, 2010 and 2012), Micheletti (2002) has noted that loosely arranged networks for action can also be established through consumption practices. Further, research has shown that political consumers demonstrate an awareness of the need to connect to the collective movement they seek to change (Micheletti and Stolle, 2007; Baek, 2010), by working to 'collectivize individual choice' (Holzer, 2006:406) thus refuting the claims made by other scholars over negative individualism. This complex negotiation of the role of the individual is useful for understanding whether commodity activism through the Oatly case involves similar effects on collective and individual political engagement.

Situating political activism within 'capitalist brand culture' (Banet-Weiser, 2012:18) raises additional concerns such as the corporate appropriation of politics (and thus consumers), as well as the implications of who is excluded from this form of engagement. Scholars note that a danger of using market logics and tactics to critique food production could lead to a risk of these movements 'reproducing the structures they seek to change.' (Roff, 2007:518; see also Shreck, 2005; Szasz, 2007; Guthman, 2008). If social change and access to politics is achieved via individual consumption habits, commodity activism can then become a highly exclusionary form of activism (Roff, 2007:518; Banet-Weiser, 2012:163), raising questions over the validity of this form.

Several scholars argue that this kind of political engagement through consumption does not allow for universal participation and privileges wealthy interests, since political participation and influence are contingent upon having 'buying power', and thus capital (Roff, 2007; Guthman, 2008). Baek's (2010) findings of US political consumption demographics mimic Yates' (2011) data on European countries, both indicating that political participation through consumption is

premised upon higher levels of education, and raising concerns over the universality of this kind of political engagement.

These issues of exclusion are important to keep in mind in exploring the value of commodity activism through the Oatly case. Equally, scholars interested in this field of research have looked at the strategies employed by commercial interests who adopt this rhetoric of change through consumption (Vogel, 2005; Duffy, 2010; Johnston and Cairns, 2012; Mukherjee, 2012). Since this political engagement is premised on consumption and squarely rooted in capitalist motives, how might this impact the breadth and depth of participation, and who is left out of the conversation? The underlying power dynamics which structure the relationship between consumers and corporations will thus be expanded on in the following sections.

This field of research into new food politics largely arrives at the same conclusion that acknowledges the duality of this kind of activism. Scholars argue that consumer power and food purchasing habits are a positive step within this context and may enhance collective action (e.g. Snow, 2004; Schor, 2007; Haenfler et al., 2012), while also raising warnings of blindly wielding market principles against and within the market (e.g. Roff, 2007) and a wariness over the lasting impact of this kind of political engagement (e.g. Chhetri et al., 2009).

This research mostly focuses on evaluating the merits or criticisms of this engagement as an isolated practice, instead of analysing it as one dynamic part of individual political engagement. Research into new food politics largely omits implications of these power struggles at the micro level, therefore drawing on literature which looks at exploitative labour and consumer resistance to this is useful to explore what this means for individuals participating with commodity activism.

Exploitative labour versus empowerment

Since a political engagement based on consumption relies on market logic, it opens the door to whether this political engagement can be used as commercial exploitation, and what space remains for individuals to subvert this exploitation. The evolution of digital media and its connection with socio-cultural turbulence has led to re-examinations of productive labour, highlighting the importance of immaterial labour for market growth (e.g. Lazzarato, 1996; Deuze, 2007; Gill and Pratt, 2008). This research has examined productive labour of media use (e.g. Andrejevic, 2008; Bolin, 2012) and consumer culture (e.g. Arvidsson, 2005 and

2006; Zwick et al., 2008), exploring the dynamics involved in the relationship between top-down power interests and grassroots user/consumer power.

What these analyses reveal is a kind of paradox apparent where users are seemingly willingly exploited (Terranova, 2004), highlighting the complicated power dynamics that operate within a political engagement based on consumption. On the one hand, labour is conceptualised as an example of the negative impacts of the market-environment on user participation, both social and political, where users' actions are appropriated by corporate interests (e.g. Zwick et al., 2008). On the other hand, scholars argue that users are not mere automatons or corporate pawns (e.g. Jenkins, 2006), revealing the tension between conceptions of active and passive individuals.

Bauman's (2007) research into the effects of consumer society on individuals reflects a more pessimistic side of the debate, arguing that consumers are now one and the same as commodities. He claims that people are marketing products for free, and commodities have become fused with their very identity. This position mirrors the concerns raised over the free digital labour arising from the Web 2.0 environment, with critics contending that these users undertake a form of free labour in service of the producers (e.g. Dyer-Witheford, 1999; Andrejevic, 2008). These arguments portray individual labour as unpaid immaterial labour from which corporations gain capital and cultural value.

Zwick et al. (2008) also conceptualise free labour as commercial exploitation, noting the way marketers seek to paradoxically encourage consumer freedom, but at the same time use this work to enhance their own brand in what they term 'co-creative labour'. Co-creative labour here becomes a tool for marketers to encourage consumer participation as a way of manufacturing 'trust, affect and shared meaning' (Zwick et al., 2008:175). Brands have long sought to capitalise on this sense of personal connection between consumers and products, and the role of identity in marketing has been well-documented in consumer research (see for example, Chernev et al., 2011, So et al., 2016).

This sense of value to be gained from consumer interactions with brands represents a concern for a political engagement which seeks to operate through consumer culture, highlighting opportunities for corporate appropriation of both personal emotion and political ideals. The emergence of literature on lifestyle brands reflects the trend of marketers striving to incorporate personal and political participation into their brands for capital gain (see for example, Fioroni and Titterton, 2009; Saviolo and Marazza, 2012; Cătălin and Andreea, 2014). These marketing strategies aim to foster and draw on self-expression of political and

personal ideals through brand culture, drawing consumers into an intimate relationship based on emotion, and impacting the authenticity and value of political engagement which arises out of brand culture.

Across these areas of research, this labour means different things to both corporations and users. Companies seek to foster personal relationships through the 'affective labour' of consumers (Zwick et al., 2008) creating an emotional economy through the production of personal experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 2011), highlighting the strong interest in affect and passion for commercial benefit. Pine and Gilmore's (2011) work demonstrates commercial strategies of manufacturing experiences for consumers that draw on memories and emotion, which thus generate the highest value returns. Similarly, the intimate relationship crafted through brand culture works to sustain deep connections with individuals, going beyond the mere products into the sphere of personal, affective spaces (Belant, 2008; Banet-Weiser, 2012).

This literature on the economic value created by drawing on personalised, emotional connections between brands and consumers is helpful in analysing the corporate agendas at play when it comes to an encouragement of political engagement. These concepts are useful for unpacking the power that structures individual political engagement via corporate products and brands. At the same time however, the contradiction of 'willing exploitation' (Terranova, 2004) within research into labour reinforces the fact that power within these new forms of political engagement is not straightforward, and cannot easily be deemed as either pure corporate domination or individual empowerment. Recent research into political empowerment through brands and advertising (e.g. Duffy, 2010) demonstrates that individuals can and do derive enjoyment from participating through branded spaces, reflecting the complex power dynamics of these evolving forms of political engagement.

Resistance and small-scale action

Duffy's (2010) study of participant engagement with Dove's advertising campaign looks into this contradiction between exploitative corporate labour and empowered consumers through user-generated content. Her study showed that individuals can still find ways of negotiating dominant ideas, while also demonstrating a reflexivity of their role to engage within corporate, branded spaces (Duffy, 2010:40-1). Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser mirror this position, arguing that practices of commodity activism cannot be labelled 'profit versus

politics', but rather they involve a combination of the two, and they have merit for individuals to find ways of self-expression through 'cultural interventions' (2012:3).

Research into the participatory aspects of Web 2.0 (e.g. Burgess and Green, 2009; Olsson, 2010), has similarly looked at the way users reclaim some of this top-down power by actively using content for their own purposes, shifting towards becoming producers, or 'prod-users' (Bruns, 2008). Likewise, Jenkins (2006) notes that convergence culture involves shifting power dynamics, impacting the shape resistance takes. He argues that the advertising industry and media industry alike have had to re-think their strategies and their relationships to consumers based on this shift in control, and processes of top-down corporate power and user power can operate simultaneously.

While these scholars show that there is room for consumers/users to resist control and make their own meaning within these spaces, others argue that companies/producers still seek to control this behaviour, shifting their strategies accordingly (Deuze, 2007; Zwick et al., 2008). Similarly, Carpentier notes that although maximalist forms of participation through the media allow for greater access and thus theoretically flatten traditional power structures, hierarchies of participation still exist between the public and the producer (2011: 69). What these scholars point out, is that resistance to dominant messages and frames by individuals still largely occurs within the boundaries established by these same powerful actors, structuring resistance and thus the kinds of acceptable participation.

Arvidsson (2006:74) discusses this contradiction of labour within brand culture, where corporations seek to encourage a sense of free consumer activity which equates to co-creative labour for the brand, while simultaneously structuring this consumer activity so that it stays within their accepted boundaries. When brands absorb political causes as part of their marketing campaigns, this false sense of consumer freedom and structuring of behaviour can become problematic for individual political engagement. As Banet-Weiser notes, only specific types of political causes are seen as appropriately brandable (2012:147), thus filtering the kinds of engagement allowed as Arvidsson (2006) observes.

This adoption of only 'safe politics' by brands, Banet-Wesier argues, means that 'nonbranded politics are rendered invisible' (2012:148). What this means for individuals then is a contradictory position, where political engagement is encouraged, but only insofar as it pertains to the brand's version of political causes. The competitive market environment which structures politics within brand

culture means that *types* of political engagement and political causes must also compete, and those who do not meet market standards will be neglected (Banet-Weiser, 2012:18).

A few studies have highlighted instances when consumers become more difficult to control and how this impacts the brand and corporation behind it (e.g. Bhattacharjee et al., 2014; Romani et al., 2015) but little attention has been paid to resistance within commodity activism specifically. Banet-Weiser's (2012:139) argument that consumer citizens have become individual political labourers working within a market setting is thus a useful entry point to examining the clash between exploitative labour and personal empowerment in this case of commodity activism.

These bodies of literature remind us that boundaries and rules still exist within these realms of media culture and brand culture alike, and my approach seeks to analyse this tension within the commodity activism sphere. These positions show that simply because corporate interests are involved, it should not lead to an automatic reduction of the argument to one of manipulation, and equally, consumer resistance is still within the boundaries established by dominant groups. While consumer/user resistance is characterised as empowering and a way to regain control from dominant groups, Jenkins (2006:248) equally warns of simply analysing resistance as one-directional, since it is a deep and multi-faceted activity, driven by many reasons and motivations. Jenkins' perspective here is useful to keep in mind in analysing the complex motivations for consumer resistance in my research.

Acknowledging the small yet creative ways that individuals demonstrate resistance and move beyond exploitative labour may be a productive way of analysing the participatory aspects of commodity activism (Gauntlett, 2011 and 2014). Taking a similar approach, Bennett (2012:28) states 'communication technologies can activate the "small world" phenomena through which distant people are in remarkably close reach.' Within dispersed consumer movements such as political consumerism and commodity activism, scholars note how significant small, daily activities can be helpful for the broader political cause, and also for a sense of individual integrity by practising personal ethics (e.g. Haenfler et al., 2012:8-9). This connection of micro participation with the macro imagined political community is also described by Carpentier as an ideal form of 'maximalist participation' (2011:17).

Paying attention to the little things, and diverse ways people use brands and digital media is extremely useful, and can in fact help us understand the broader picture

of participation in specific contexts, answering some of the questions over the fruitfulness of new forms of political engagement. For that reason, research on practices of participation at the amateur level is highly beneficial to understanding the way people express their opinions and interact diversely with broader political issues, as Gauntlett remarks, 'small steps into a changed world are better than no steps' (2014:2).

Conclusion

The key debates which structure literature around alternative modes of political engagement such as commodity activism illustrate both the risks associated with individualism and commercialisation of politics, as well as the potential to enhance individual and collective action. They are important arguments to keep in mind, to understand the nuances of commodity activism that is facilitated by digital media in this research.

Exploring the often contradictory discussions on how labour and resistance operate within these forms of activism allows for a closer analysis of the relationship between individual grassroots action and corporate influence. This body of literature reminds us to move beyond conceptualising this relationship as a binary construction, and instead pay attention to the small, micro contexts and how individuals make meaning for themselves and connect to the macro political community.

Carpentier's discussion of multi-site, maximalist political engagement (2011:17-19) is thus a fruitful position to adopt. Since maximalist participation fuses multiple sites of participation, it thus allows for a deeper engagement with the political, extending beyond institutional politics through diverse micro and macro forms of participation (Carpentier, 2011:17). This is similar to Gauntlett's argument for a synthesis of both on- and offline environments; he notes that digital technologies and the internet are not solely responsible for creative participation, but that they certainly help to facilitate and amplify it, allowing for increased access through visibility (2014:1). In that way, our focus as researchers should not be limited to an 'either/or' debate, but instead we should acknowledge that both online and offline spaces have merits, and both kinds of participation should be encouraged (2014:2-3).

This perspective is useful for analysing where the use of digital media by both corporations and consumers aids engagement, yet makes up just one part of a multi-site interaction. On the one hand, we should avoid an overly deterministic

approach to the role of digital media in political engagement in arguing that it is the single reason for political action. Yet, we must still acknowledge the centrality of media technology, particularly digital media platforms, and the part they play in emerging activist practices. By exploring political engagement as part of this multi-site approach, and looking at how individual action operates within this situated context will help unpack the value of commodity activism as it fits into emerging forms of political engagement.

Researching the individual and the collective

This research employed qualitative semi-structured interviews with Oatly consumers and employees in Sweden in order to analyse the power dynamic of the relationship between Oatly and their consumers and thus the value of commodity activism through digital media. Interviews with 18 individuals were conducted in total; 10 with Oatly consumers, and 8 with employees of Oatly. The consumer group of interviews are referred to as ‘consumers’ throughout this research because their political engagement in this case is premised upon their consumption and interaction with Oatly’s products. This chapter details the steps taken to recruit and conduct these interviews, the process of data analysis, as well as a discussion of methodology.

The case

Using a case example was a productive approach for this research because it allowed for a grounded, contextualised analysis of the wider phenomenon of commodity activism within this setting, as a way to gain ‘insights into cultural processes’ (Gray, 2003:68). This particular case is appropriate for providing cultural insights into alternative forms of political engagement since it demonstrates a diverse fusion of activist practices which operate through the non-traditional political space of brand culture and the media. The surrounding lawsuit between Oatly and LRF Mjölks further points to the suitability of this particular case, since it sparked such widespread public debate in mainstream and social media, and involved a variety of actors, making it a rich site of analysis.

While the use of cases has been criticised for a lack of generalisability, thus influencing their validity as a research method, Flyvbjerg argues that this underestimates ‘the power of the good example’ (2001:77). He notes that in-

depth, qualitative cases can be very effective at generalising, particularly as a supplementary method, while also stating that the notion of generalisability has tended to be 'overvalued' (2001:77). Therefore, drawing on a case as well as interviews in this thesis can be seen to provide a useful, contextualised example of how political engagement through consumption operates.

In choosing methods which enhance cases, Gray (2003:70) notes that interviews are highly suited for research which addresses practices. As this thesis aims to explore the practices of political participation carried out by Oatly consumers, the interview method proved useful to explore this case. The qualitative semi-structured interviews, as well as interviewing both sides of the case – employees and consumers, helped to gain a detailed understanding of this relationship, narrowing in on the specific story as it is told by a diverse network of actors (Flyvbjerg, 2004:400). The qualitative aspect of these interviews focused on nuances of interviewees' experiences, concerned with their daily lives and taking a form similar to daily conversation (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:18).

Recruitment and sampling

Firstly, two pilot interviews were conducted at the start of this project, and they proved vital in evaluating the research questions and refining the topic (Gray, 2003:102), helping to reveal early issues that could be addressed through sampling. Since the aim of the thesis was to explore political engagement, an early problem faced during these pilot interviews was speaking with people who were Oatly consumers based on dietary restrictions, such as lactose intolerance. For these participants, their use of Oatly's products was not connected to a kind of political engagement, or interaction with the 'milk wars' that this project sought to investigate. Thus, the piloting process was beneficial for informing where calls for research participants were posted, and lead to further groundwork to research the specific interest groups who were involved in engaging with the lawsuit and were highly active online.

Following Gobo's steps for sampling procedure (2004:417), the research questions formed the starting point, identifying the area of exploration as political engagement through consumption. This area was also extended to sample based on incidents, therefore the lawsuit became a central concept around which to look for participants. Age range and gender of participants was left open, since the aim was to understand political engagement on the individual level, regardless of these demographics, however all participants were over the age of 16 to comply with

ethical guidelines. The sample was limited to individuals living in Sweden since Oatly are a Swedish brand and due to the situated context of the lawsuit between LRF Mjölkk.

Based on early research conducted into mainstream media debates surrounding the lawsuit between Oatly and LRF Mjölkk, it became clear that vegan and animal rights actors were the main group engaged in political interactions, and there was a significant amount of debate on social media channels as well as personal blogs.¹⁸ Significance thus played a key role in where call for participants information was posted, leading to an assessment of which areas would likely contain the most relevant people for this case. Consumer interview participants were therefore solicited firstly through a call for research participants posted in the two largest vegan Facebook groups in Skåne and Sweden; *Veganer i Sverige* and *Vegan i Södra Sverige*?¹⁹. Since this research seeks to investigate political engagement of a vegan food alternative, it made sense to post the call for participants initially in these two Facebook groups.

Drawing on preliminary research the #BackaOatly Facebook event²⁰ was also discovered, as it was referenced several times in both mainstream and social media as a response to the lawsuit, and included over 2,000 invited guests, therefore posting a call for participants flyer here directly related to the Oatly lawsuit. Individual bloggers in Sweden were also solicited, based on a search of blog posts related to Oatly in between 2014-2015 in line with 'detecting cases within extreme situations' of purposive sampling (Gobo, 2004:418). This additional targeted sampling allowed for saturation of the area of exploration (political engagement with Oatly) and to 'comprehensively explore it and its relationship to other concepts' (the lawsuit) (Rudestam and Newton, 2014:124).

Interviews with Oatly employees were solicited through personal email with one member of staff, then to the remaining 7 participants using snowball sampling (Gobo, 2004:419). The decision to conduct a high amount of interviews with different Oatly employees in various positions across the company was necessary to compare their responses with each other. That way, not just one person's - for example, the CEO's - voice matters and comes to represent the whole company.

¹⁸ For example: <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article19747030.ab>, <http://omni.se/veganattack-mot-arla-och-svensk-mjolk-pa-facebook/a/67cb7001-4d53-4ccb-a495-3019a68bddaf>

¹⁹ *Veganer i Sverige* Facebook group (10,029 members): www.facebook.com/groups/243322562345574/ and *Vegan i Södra Sverige?* Facebook group (857 members): www.facebook.com/groups/125995460783841/

²⁰ www.facebook.com/events/124789427885596/

While it is impossible to argue that all of these voices together represent the entire company, it certainly creates a deeper picture of the decisions behind the company, from different perspectives within it, allowing for a more complex understanding of how Oatly as a group of people reflect on their relationship with their consumers.

To reach the final number of participants, the aim was to continue conducting interviews until the point of a feeling of 'saturation' (Rudestam and Newton, 2014:125) where themes and answers began to repeat themselves. For the consumer interviews, this saturation point began around the eighth interview, however two more interviews were conducted in order to solidify these initial data patterns, giving a total of 10 consumer participants. During this process of reaching the final number of participants, the transcripts were constantly reviewed after each interview to see that there was enough rich data gathered.

Although Rudestam and Newton (2014:125) caution that full saturation can never completely occur, due to the uniqueness of each participant's viewpoint, they note that 'it is important to collect sufficient data to represent the breadth and depth of the phenomenon without becoming overwhelmed.' Gray (2003:101) supports this point of manageability, arguing that small-scale projects should allow for enough participants to provide detailed data, but not so many that this data becomes too difficult to analyse. Following their perspectives, the total number of 18 participants is suitable for the scope and length of this project, and allowed for proper management the quantity of data without impacting the quality of the analysis.

The interviews

Interviews with consumers ranged between 50-90 minutes, and were conducted both in person and over the phone depending on the participants' proximity to the Malmö/Lund area. Within these 10 consumer participants, 8 identified as vegans and animal rights activists. Interviews with Oatly employees ranged between 60-90 minutes and were conducted in person with the following positions: CEO, creative director, sustainability manager, social media manager, communications director, two co-founders, and consumer relations specialist.

All of the interviews took the form of semi-structured qualitative interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), and although key topics and questions were prepared, the aim here was to make these flexible, forming a kind of 'structured conversation' (Gray, 2003:95). The interviews followed broad topics and

questions in a prepared interview guide (see Appendix A) which was deliberately flexible and customised for each participant if necessary, for example, pertaining to specific job function for the Oatly employees. Although there was an interview guide, each participant was made aware that they could add or amend the questions at any time, and also return to questions at a later time if needed.

The goal was to allow participants the space to elaborate on a specific question in-depth if they felt it required more time, and also feel free to raise additional discussion points at any time during the interview. The semi-structured nature allowed for space to veer off this set list, delving deeper into certain topics raised by participants. In this way, it was more of a two-way conversation which provided added depth to the study as it created a more relaxed environment for a dialogue between the researcher and the subject, rather than an interrogation.

This approach to the collaborative process of interviews means reflecting on the knowledge produced during these interviews. Following Frankenberg (1993) and Gray's (2003) position, interviews are seen as social constructions, rather than providing access to "the truth". Seeing these interactions between myself and the participants as 'social encounters' where both researcher and subject participate in the production of experiences and feelings (Rapley, 2004) helps to avoid a kind of one-way exploitation or farming for information from these participants.

This active production of experience can be seen as a limitation, however one way of countering this was to conduct fairly long interviews with these participants so that both of us had the space to continue this production of knowledge. Being aware of the construction of experience by the participants, and often returning to the same themes later in the interviews, made it possible to more fully contrast the different ways they explained the same issue. Although speaking about their own experiences often meant constructing a version of the truth, a common critique of research interviews, the opinions of the participants were still useful data of the way they articulated their experiences (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:287).

Delving into the data

Analysing the data involved a constant process of 'checking, questioning, and theorizing the interview findings' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:288) throughout each stage. Transcribing each interview from the recordings was highly beneficial to the analysis process, as it allowed for re-examination of the conversations and immersion in the data. After transcribing the interviews, everything was reviewed

again in an attempt to become more familiar with the data, listening to recordings as well as re-reading the transcripts. Altheide (1996:43) notes that this repetition is an important component of qualitative data analysis.

Since the interviews conducted were long, the transcripts provided rich data that proved helpful for a qualitative approach. Data analysis was conducted in several phases, and extensive reading of data was carried out throughout the process. It was important not to force pre-existing categories or themes onto the data, by making sure to constantly revise the analytical categories and concepts. The coding process was done after extensive reading and note-taking (Altheide, 1996:43), using different colours and sorting through each transcript to try to find patterns (Berger, 2011:147). Each colour corresponded to a different theme identified in the data, and continuous note-taking occurred during this coding on common threads that appeared. Following this physical colour-coding process, portions were extracted from each transcript and added into the same text file digitally (Appendix B).

This digital process was somewhat helpful to order the categories and themes, however it was more productive to also make hardcopies of these cut-outs to rearrange specific data more easily, and get an overall picture, seeing where each theme intersected. During this time, it was important to keep returning to the complete transcripts to see the full context of participants' statements, so that information was not lost or interpreted wrongly. After noting key words and potential concepts within these categories, draft summaries of the categories were written (Altheide, 1996:43) under two broad themes of navigation of corporate appropriation of politics and labour of the lawsuit.

Following Flyvbjerg's methodological guidelines, I chose to 'place power at the core' of my analysis (2001:131) which lead to a central point of the clash between corporate and consumer interests. The power struggle of this relationship thus underpins my analysis as a whole, connecting the 'little things' to the wider context of the phenomena (Flyvbjerg, 2001:132-6), which meant the analytical process fit well with the use of a case and interviews.

Reflecting on ethics and the role of the researcher

In line with my position on the constructed nature of knowledge and experiences during the data collection phase, the role of the researcher must be analysed. During the interviews with consumers a comfortable and open atmosphere was attempted by talking about the researcher's personal experiences and position,

thus trying to move away from just extracting information from participants. This emphasis on 'interview-data-as-topic' versus 'interview-data-as-resource' (Rapley, 2004) led to attempts at both creating and acknowledging the interactive, two-way element of these interviews.

Offering information about my own role as a researcher, my ethical framework as a vegan and experience being from a similar cultural context to Sweden was important for the interviews with consumers. As a New Zealander, the experience of living in a cultural and political environment where dairy production is the primary industry and holds a prominent position in society is similar to Sweden. This similarity was discussed, as well as my experience of veganism with many participants during interviews in an attempt to create a mutual dialogue. The reason for this is that this research focuses on individuals involved in the animal rights movement and vegan movements, which are minority movements, therefore it was crucial to make the participants understand that it was a safe environment for them to express their views. In Gray's discussion of Frankenberg's research she similarly notes the way speaking about the researcher's own experiences helped to give permission to minority groups when discussing taboo subjects (2003:96-7).

Animal activist practices and similarly vegan food consumption are often seen as radical and extreme (Munro, 2005:75-6), thus talking about this topic as it relates to personal political engagement was a potentially sensitive subject for participants. I believe drawing on my own experience as an ethical vegan (and consumer of plant-milk products) helped to remove some of the barriers of discomfort in the hopes of allowing the participants to speak freely about their activist practices without feeling discriminated against. On the other hand, this acknowledgement of my experience and position could be seen as creating a false sense of trust and friendship with participants, therefore it could be an exploitation of this trust in eliciting more open responses from them.

This discussion points to an ethical grey area within loosely-structured conversation-like interviews, where the boundary between creating a comfortable environment may in some ways obscure the research component. However, following a constructionist perspective of interviewing, the 'non-neutrality' of the interviewer is seen as an important part of the collaborative process of the interaction (Rapley, 2004:19). These perspectives highlight an attempt to remove hierarchies between researcher and object, as Rapley notes 'this cooperative, engaged relationship – centred on mutual self-disclosure – can encourage 'deep disclosure'.' (2004:19). These perspectives were kept in mind and supported my mutual disclosures, where offering information on my own position helped

reinforce the collaborative aspect of the interviews. As several scholars note, it is almost impossible for researchers to actually “be neutral” since they are always in control of the conversation, they initiated it and essentially structure the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Rapley, 2004).

Another reflection on an ethical issue could be the language barrier between myself and participants. This is an area which could have been strengthened, particularly with phone interviews since it could have made it more difficult for participants to fully express themselves, adding an extra layer of construction. Interviewees may not have felt as comfortable speaking in English compared to if they were speaking Swedish. To compensate for this potential language limitation, each participant was made aware that they could pause at any moment, ask for clarification, or use Swedish words if they felt the need to. A few participants took the opportunity to ask me to re-state a question which illustrated that they felt comfortable with our interaction.

To maintain transparency throughout this research process, all interview participants were given the opportunity to read their transcripts and the quotes used in the final project. Recordings of all interviews were kept in a safe environment and were not shared with anyone but myself. All names of consumer interview subjects have been changed, however names of Oatly employees have not been changed since this information and their job titles are public knowledge.

Exploring the contradictions of political engagement

This chapter analyses the power dynamics of the relationship between Oatly and their consumers, looking at the constant push-and-pull that reveals itself through these interviews. The nuanced perspectives these consumers possess in their negotiation of doing politics within branded spaces is evident, and while broad patterns emerge from these interviews, the diversity of each person’s view is important to keep in mind so as not to overlook each experience as unique and grounded in this situated context (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:102). All consumer interviewees were aware of the lawsuit between Oatly and LRF Mjölke, and although not all of these individuals produced content in relation to the lawsuit, this incident formed a large part of their discussions and testimony during the interviews.

While the individuals who produced content during the lawsuit demonstrated slightly different motivations for participating, there is a critical awareness of their own role as activists and consumers, highlighting the lawsuit as one key area of interaction with Oatly's brand. Outside of the lawsuit, interviewees primarily interacted with Oatly through various products by way of cooking, sharing images and using buying habits to influence others. Across all of the interviews with Oatly employees their opinions of their consumers were very alike, and for all employees the lawsuit was also a major discussion point.

Based on this, the two main themes which presented themselves as sites where the political relationship between Oatly and the consumers played out were; the navigation of Oatly's appropriation of politics, and the labour of fighting the milk wars. The first theme looks at individuals' use of critical consumption and digital media as areas of resistance, and their awareness of Oatly's adoption of political causes. Following this, the clash between exploitative labour and individual political engagement during the lawsuit examines the duality and contradictory nature of these positions.

'We want to change the world, right?'²¹ Navigating corporate appropriation of politics

As a space for political engagement, brand culture proves problematic as it seems to contradict the commitment to political change for the public good, focusing instead on market incentives. For Oatly, 2014 saw the successful re-launch of their company as a lifestyle brand following the direction of their newly appointed CEO Toni Petersson. Through product and online marketing they shifted to position themselves as a value-based brand, linking their new image with an adoption of a political position based on environmentalism in support of plant-based agriculture.

The paradox of situating political activism within a corporate space is summarised in Oatly's CEO's statement 'The more we sell, the better we do for the world' (Petersson, 2016). Individuals are then able to access these political values by consuming Oatly products; "changing the world" here becomes inseparable from consumer culture, and specifically through buying Oatly's brand. There is a strong sense of Oatly drawing on a political position that reflects current ethical consumption trends (Mujerakhee and Banet-Weiser, 2012:10) raising the

²¹ Interview, Toni Petersson, 2016

question so central to commodity activism, of how corporate appropriation of political ideals impacts political engagement for individuals, and for the cause itself.

How then do consumers navigate this apparent commercialisation of political values by Oatly in meaningful and critical ways, and what does this reveal about the value of commodity activism for their own political engagement? What these interviewees show is diverse individual political engagement that speaks to the wider imagined political community, combining micro everyday participation with macro participation (Carpentier, 2011:17) in unique ways. Within this theme, consumers navigate this corporate appropriation firstly through critical consumption choices, secondly, fusing online and offline spaces for activism to suit their own needs, and lastly by finding space for resistance against corporate messages.

Making critical consumption choices

Consumers' engagement with Oatly represents a communicative space for political engagement (Dahlgren, 2009:115); for many interviewees, Oatly's products are seen as one tool for their political advocacy, whether it be veganism, animal rights or environmentalism. Their 'critical consumption' (Yates, 2011) of Oatly's products becomes one component of their multi-site participation with vegan issues.

Several interviewees express the importance of Oatly's products and the role of influencing individual food purchasing habits in promoting the vegan cause. Consumption and production of alternative food products is spoken of as closely connected to advocacy for the wider cause, and daily purchasing habits form a significant part of their political action:

I do think if we're going to create a vegan world which is my vision, we need alternatives. Good alternatives. (Erik)

I feel great personally buying Oatly products, since we buy stuff everyday isn't it better if it's vegan stuff? And if you can show people that they can still enjoy it more than non-vegan food then that's good. I think what we buy is one of the most powerful things we can do for the vegan cause. (Daniel)

Accessing political values through a consumer product like Oatly can be seen as one such space for communicative action, connecting the micro everyday sites of food consumption to the macro issues of sustainability, animal rights and

veganism. As Dahlgren (2009:115-6) notes, individuals need spaces connected to their everyday life-worlds in which they can talk to others about political issues. Equally, interviewees show that they undertake 'critical consumption' (Yates, 2011), basing their behaviour on their political and ethical agendas, which is support for all vegan alternatives, and their potential to enable the growth of the movement by helping others to access veganism practically.

Consumer activity here exemplifies the rhetoric of 'eating for change' (Johnston and Cairns: 2012), situated within a 'new politics of food' (Schweikhardt and Browne 2001) in which political engagement hinges on individual consumption patterns of alternative milk and meat products. Cherry's (2006:155-6) discussion of the vegan movement reflects these positions, noting that veganism should be seen as a 'cultural movement' which unlike other traditional social movements, is centred on 'everyday practices in one's lifestyle.'

While these everyday food practices can be seen as positive for enhancing a sense of consumer power, interviewees' acknowledgement of the role of consumer products in helping the vegan cause means situating political change firmly within capitalist culture. There is a danger of relying heavily on the logics of the market, which in this case would seem to place control with the corporation, Oatly, if doing politics can only be accessed through buying (and thus promoting) Oatly's products. Consumers' individual political advocacy *using* Oatly's products would seem to enhance Oatly's commercial agenda, as the company have sought to draw on political issues like environmentalism through their lifestyle branding. As Oatly's creative director John remarks:

So lifestyle for me isn't Red Bull. It's about finding a way to become part of peoples' lives [...] when the 16-22 year old girls are walking around flashing off their little oat drink cartons, it's because [...] whatever we're talking about is what they stand for. So we find a way to fit in to their lives.

For Oatly, becoming 'part of peoples' lives' is then connected to their re-branding, as a strategy for positioning personal politics with their brand. This reflects the tension between commercial and consumer ideals, where the inclusion of Oatly's products in individuals' everyday lives functions both as corporate appropriation of politics, and also as individual political engagement. However, what many consumers demonstrate is a critical awareness of this commercial motivation, extending their engagement beyond the products and the company itself, where their own form of activism can be achieved in this setting.

Several interviewees show a reflexivity over their own use of Oatly's products and brand, as well as a mindfulness of Oatly's position as a commercial entity:

Just because you have a vegetarian alternative you should only go like what? Work for nothing? People have to make their money and pay for their rent and food. You have to be allowed to have a business. How could we otherwise get our oat milk? Otherwise we should only drink water or cow milk. I don't want cow milk. (Olivia)

I don't actually care if [Oatly] mean what they say, but what they're saying is the truth to me. And if it's true to me it doesn't have to be for them. So if they can give me the products that I want, even if they don't use it or believe in it for themselves, anyhow they give me what I want and I'm thankful for that. (Malin)

For consumers, their reflexivity over profit-motives negotiates this corporate appropriation of politics in very pragmatic terms, indicating the ambivalent position of brand cultures today. On the one hand, this individualism is positive since interviewees show they are not passive consumers by acknowledging market influences on Oatly's political messaging. On the other hand, this focus on 'what I get for myself' as an individual in this exchange, seemingly undercuts the value of doing politics through brand culture where engagement is motivated by individual needs rather than collective ones (Maniates, 2001; Baek, 2010:1066).

Here, the core debates of consumption as a form of political engagement are reflected, highlighting the dialectic of individualism as both positive and negative. This kind of individualism sits uneasily within political engagement, since it places the consumer's perspective ahead of the collective movement. However, interviewees reflect on this duality of commodity activism, showing that it is possible for them to occupy *both* positions of consumer and activist, while maintaining some control for themselves through a combination of these roles. Political engagement in this case goes beyond supporting the brand itself, and also beyond individual gain, highlighting the nuances of commodity activism within different contexts:

It's not like when I take a picture I keep Oatly in the background to emphasise the vegan. For me it's beyond that and I want to encourage people to cook vegan food and I don't care really about the products as long as they are vegan. (Katrine)

The interaction between a sense of self, the brand, and the wider political collective is much more complex in this case, with interviewees demonstrating

their desire to strengthen the vegan and animal rights movement through their critical consumption. Their own experience as individuals, being vegans, becomes connected to the macro political community, which seeks to inspire communal mobilisation around veganism, a theme which is repeated in interviewees' fluid use of both online and offline spaces for activism.

Connected spaces of political engagement

For many interviewees, Oatly products are used as a talking point through which to raise awareness about alternative eating habits such as veganism and animal rights across both offline and online spheres. Interviewees showed that they act as advocates for the vegan movement in their daily lives, whether it be talking with colleagues in the workplace or posting online, often using products like Oatly as a doorway in this quest to inform others and share their political views on milk:

Many times when I've been drinking Oatly people have been intrigued and asking about stuff. If I'm going out for coffee with some friends and I get oat milk, they're like 'I'll try that - oh it actually tastes good!' So I think that's one of the best ways to talk about veganism, because they try it and maybe it'll change their habits. (Daniel)

This notion of showing positive vegan examples through consumerist practices is mirrored in the online sphere, fusing and extending the spaces for political engagement. Lifestyle blogger Elin describes the dual purpose of her blog as centred on education about animal rights as well as highlighting vegan products:

My focus is to start more awareness of the animal industry, and that people can buy more animal-friendly products [...] because people don't know that there are alternatives to what we have in the regular stores to today.

For Elin, being an animal rights activist means helping others improve their own consumption patterns using her blog, Instagram account and offline interactions to do so. Similarly, another interviewee Olivia, describes that her blog profiles many vegan brands, not just Oatly, because she wants to be 'a small kind of niched news desk for vegetarian products' with 'tips about what to use and why you should not have milk in a sustainable version ... to use vegetarian milk instead.' Vegan education becomes linked to sharing of consumer products and practices for both of these interviewees, aided by the tools of digital media and the practice of critical consumption.

For almost all interviewees, they do not distinguish between the value of offline versus online spaces for their own political engagement and for educating others about veganism, speaking fluidly of these spaces as a kind of synthesis of both. In talking about his own way of doing animal rights and vegan activism, Erik sees a benefit in using diverse platforms for action, through a combination of both online and physical outlets:

I don't buy that something is real, and something is not real, because it is real even if it's something online [...] you don't know what will be most effective [...] it's also good to go in different places and you can use the same kind of material to different kind of target groups, different platforms, different media outlets.

This contrasts with Lekakis' (2013:117) findings of consumers participating with Fairtrade coffee activism, who did not view digital technology as a way to enhance their engagement with the cause but instead showed preference for physical spaces for activism. In this case however, interviewees see digital technology as directly enabling their own political engagement for its ability to 'find others that think the same' (Malin), 'reach so many more people' (Daniel), and be 'open 24 hours a day' (Patrik). Their own use of the digitally-networked environment to enhance their political engagement with issues like veganism reflects the positive potential of digital media described by many researchers as facilitating political participation and ease of access (e.g. Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008; Gauntlett, 2014).

Here, digital media is not the only mode of political engagement for these individuals, but rather the offline act of critical consumption is 'given a substantial boost by the opportunity to connect, organise, share ideas and inspire each other.' (Gauntlett, 2014). This connected space where political activism occurs for these individuals comes to represent 'maximalist participation' (Carpentier, 2011:17), combining micro participation in everyday spaces of work and home life with macro participation in the broader online political community. For individual political engagement, this can be seen as a positive example of a diverse and personal use of platforms to connect to other politically-minded people and share their views through positive examples.

When I share stuff I use the hashtag vegan, to share vegan stuff [...] I have non-vegan followers that I want to show 'ah this could be vegan as well!' - for me part of the vegan activist thing. (Katrine)

These online and offline activities of vegan and animal rights advocates also create significant brand value and exposure for Oatly, however these same consumers

also represent an obstacle to Oatly's brand image, signalling the twofold outcome of creating a political brand identity, and highlighting the struggle for control over expression between Oatly and their consumers. What implications does this raise for a politics expressed through the realm of private enterprises, and what space does it leave for individual resistance to these dominant structures?

Transgressing brand legitimacy: Militant vegans

Undesirable types of consumer engagement that arise in this case illustrate the contestation over power in this corporate/consumer relationship, demonstrating the unpredictability that comes with shaping a brand culture around political ideals (Banet-Weiser, 2012:218). The consumers that fall outside of the bounds of Oatly's control and brand image are characterised by Oatly as 'militant' (John, Björn) 'radical' (Toni) and 'hardcore' (Sara) vegans whom Oatly seek to distance themselves from.

Oatly's characterisation of militant vegan consumers has implications for the validity of commodity activism as a whole, since it highlights the priority of market imperatives over participatory inclusion. Brands like Oatly can then acceptably 'adopt' political ideals such as veganism or sustainability, but their reaction to this "extreme" group of consumers shows that this is a limited kind of politics, and one that does not accommodate any or all kinds of engagement. This corporate appropriation and mediation of acceptable political engagement ultimately places Oatly in control of who can and cannot participate. As Banet-Weiser notes 'Within these dynamics, the brand is the legitimating factor, no matter what the specific political ideology or practice in question.' (2012:18)

Oatly had originally included a statement (Appendix C) claiming they were a 'vegan company' on their packaging (*Image 1*). However as Oatly's creative director John describes, they felt the need to remove the statement because of the unwanted reactions from vegan consumers who would ask questions over the extent of Oatly employees' veganism. They instead pivoted to frame their political stance towards environmentalism:

The expectation level was so high [...] and the militant vegans will go in and they'll look at the fertiliser that you use on the fields actually comes from animals [...] it became quite; 'let's just not encourage that.'



Image 1:
Vegan statement on Oatly's packaging²²

The decision by Oatly to initially communicate their apparent vegan stance and then remove it can be seen as their appropriation of the vegan cause for marketing purposes rather than political ones. This has implications for vegan consumers who felt drawn to Oatly because of their vegan statement and the connection to their ethical worldview. Some interviewees expressed their disappointment at Oatly's change of heart over being an overtly vegan company, demonstrating an awareness of the implications of what co-opting veganism might mean for the movement:

I feel like [Oatly are] speaking for vegans in a way that is harmful for vegans, and they get more money from it [...] That's really harmful I think [...] Because when I read it I thought 'oh here's a company being proud of the vegan', and then you read all of the other slogans in that light, of the vegan thing. And now it feels like yeah well how do you feel about vegans? (Katrine)

²² image credit: lilinhaangel.com

Framing their communication of plant-based foods from an environmental perspective rather than a vegan perspective demonstrates Oatly's priority to the brand, rather than the politics. Banet-Weiser discusses the conditions that political issues must meet in order for them to qualify for being incorporated into a brand. She argues that brands 'attach to politics that are legible in brand vocabulary' and thus represent 'safe politics' (2012:148). Animal rights and veganism are seen by Oatly as too unpredictable for their brand image, and thus "militant" vegan consumers must be discouraged from engaging with Oatly:

So here's the thing with vegans, that's their problem [...] if you start to talk about the animals first then you will get like an opposite - their reaction will be like opposite to yours. And that's unfortunately the way vegans today communicate, which is a problem to get mainstream in here. But if they talk about health and the environment, the process will be shorter. So that's why we don't communicate about animal welfare. (Toni, CEO of Oatly)

Here we see the preconditions that exist for individual political engagement; some forms of political issues are positive for Oatly to encourage and align with their image, but only if it conforms to their version of what is brandable. Since militant and radical vegans represent an obstacle to Oatly becoming mainstream and thus threatening their profit growth, they cannot be included in doing their politics through Oatly. As Arvidsson (2005:244) notes, current brand management is premised upon the seemingly free empowerment of consumers, but equally on making sure this freedom of engagement is structured within very specific boundaries.

As we have seen however, consumers make their own meaning through their engagement with Oatly, and stand to gain something for themselves. Thus, regardless of Oatly's re-framing of their image to omit the animal rights perspective, consumers can still imbue this meaning into the brand. For many interviewees, the product and brand still symbolise veganism and are inherently connected to animal rights activism. One vegan blogger describes why she feels an affinity towards Oatly, and why she is drawn to them: 'from what I see and what I hear, I think [Oatly] stand for the animal rights perspective ... from the beginning I think it's animal rights perspective. I hope so!' (Elin). Her hopes here are bound up with Oatly being this vegan company and taking a stand for animal rights; for her she finds meaning in this particular connection.

As a platform for political engagement then, these consumers' subversion of Oatly's control by continuing to connect the products with an animal rights

perspective shows that individuals can still operate within dominant frameworks to do politics their own way. A number of interviewees demonstrated an awareness of the different levels of veganism as both empowerment and appropriation, where the authenticity of Oatly's vegan stance was negotiated in terms of what it provided to them as individuals:

Even if [Oatly] aren't honest about veganism, their products tick all the boxes that I need to, so it wouldn't really matter. I think if you can have a product that's sustainable and better for the environment and for animals, then how you get there isn't really as important as the end result. (Daniel)

To me it doesn't matter if [Toni] is vegan or not. What matters to me is that he seems to care [...] And he's found a way to explain the product that talks directly to vegans. So I don't care if he's vegan. (Malin)

Interviewees show that they can transform Oatly's version of veganism to meet their own needs, so that Oatly's attempts at re-framing to exclude veganism hold less influence; there is still space that exists within this context for resistance and negotiation of the dominant meaning. The characterisation of militant vegans highlights the tension of situating politics alongside market imperatives, and therefore is a significant ramification of political engagement that is guided by consumer culture. If market imperatives shape political expression in this way, influencing the kind of communication Oatly produce, anyone, including radical vegans can be excluded, and their views can become marginalised.

These connected modes of political engagement by vegans and environmentalists demonstrate the duality of participation in this case. Their political engagement negotiates corporate appropriation of political values but can also be seen as exploitative consumer labour, working to promote Oatly's brand image, and equally, if accessing political values is achieved through consumer practices, who is excluded from participating?

The labour of fighting the milk wars

‘Our consumers have been fighting for us, they’ve been running this war for us’

(Toni, CEO of Oatly)

Toni’s statement encapsulates the duality of individual political engagement of consumers “fighting” in the milk wars. Consumers’ activities during the lawsuit between Oatly and LRF Mjölkk illustrate a constant tension between exploitative/appropriative labour and individual empowerment, and the ongoing push-and-pull of control between corporate and consumer interests. At the same time that individuals engage with the politics of ethical food consumption and veganism through the lawsuit, this participation doubly operates as co-creative labour (Zwick et al., 2008), aiding in making Oatly’s brand synonymous with a sense of truth and the politics of milk.

Although the court ruled against Oatly, they characterise this as a win since the brand gained a high amount of public exposure, as co-founder Björn notes, ‘it’s the best thing that ever happened to the company, hands down [...] all the big newspapers and editorial pages...’ This win was largely built on the labour of Oatly supporters, who created online content such as blog posts, wrote opinion articles and took to social media to express their support of Oatly, as social media manager Sara describes ‘When we put the lawsuit on the net and told the story I think people did kind of the job for us to some point.’

While this labour serves to bolster Oatly’s positive political associations, creating significant brand value for the company, what interviewees reveal is not a straightforward case of exploitation, or one-dimensional adoration on the part of consumers. Rather, many interviewees demonstrate a desire to enhance their own political agendas as opposed to the brand through an awareness of collective action, and reflexivity of their own political engagement. There is again a back and forth negotiation of control within this relationship, underscoring the ambivalence of brand culture and the highly individualised climate of neoliberalism, where consumer participation is often contingent upon them getting something for themselves from this interaction. Within this theme, this ambivalence presents itself firstly in the manufacturing of brand value through truth, secondly in the duality of emotion, and lastly subverting labour through personalised political engagement.

Manufacturing brand value through truth

A common thread across both consumer and employee interviews was a sense of ideological and political truth related to Oatly's position during the lawsuit. Through the online and offline interaction with the lawsuit, consumer activity and opinion can be seen to manufacture brand value for Oatly through these discussions of the truth. Consumers' communication about their views of the truth over the political issue of ethical milk work simultaneously as individual political engagement, but also make this truth inseparable from the brand.

We see this creation of truth operating through the online engagement with the #BackaOatly hashtag campaign, meaning 'support Oatly' (*Image 2*). The court's decision to ban Oatly's marketing slogans such as 'It's like milk, but made for humans' and 'No milk, no soy, no badness' sparked widespread political engagement online, with Oatly supporters rallying to keep these phrases alive on social media with initiatives like this.



Image 2

Image created for #BackaOatly Facebook page and Twitter²³

The hashtag #BackaOatly quickly became popular across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and called for individuals to join together by following four simple steps: taking photos of their plant-based food, adding the hashtag 'support Oatly' and 'Swedish Milk', along with one of the banned slogans, and then sharing their images with their online networks:

²³ image credit: #BackaOatly

The aim is to go to social media to spread the phrases and messages that were banned in the judgment. Let this be used as an advantage and to show the absurdity of the judgement! We as individuals are not prohibited from using phrases and therefore we are taking over. - #BackaOatly

For most interviewees, sharing these illegal marketing phrases is used by them as a way of promoting the truth about dairy production, and to engage others in conversations about ethical food consumption. Speaking about her use of the #BackaOatly hashtag with Oatly's banned marketing slogans, one interviewee notes:

I thought [Oatly] are standing for just telling the truth about milk, because it's *not* for humans! [...] and the milk industry is a big evil company and I wanted people to see how wrong it is for Oatly to lose in court for actually speaking the truth, so I put the hashtag and tweeted so much to try and open their eyes. (Mathilda)

Individual political engagement like this which draws Oatly's own marketing slogans into political discussions over veganism, animal rights and ethical food manufactures value for Oatly, doubling as a form of free labour. As Zwick et al. note, 'Value within this model is the result of *social* communication...as consumers accept the marketer's value proposition and complement and elaborate on its meaning, effectiveness, and functionality, their activities are transformed into acts of production.' (2008:175, original emphasis).

This communication of an ideological truth of ethical milk by consumers dually works to align this truth directly with Oatly's brand, transforming their political engagement into brand work. By sharing Oatly's marketing slogans, consumer activity is rendered an act of spreading "the forbidden truth", making Oatly's slogans and thus their brand position, synonymous with these ideals. Backa as a hashtag has a history in Sweden of being used to show support for individuals who were associated with political causes. In these cases, the social media hashtags became not only a way of supporting certain celebrities for taking a political stance on various issues, but also as a kind of activism to demonstrate one's affinity for the cause itself. For example, #BackaAdam became popular on social media in July 2015 when Swedish rapper Adam Tensta walked off during a television broadcast on TV4 in protest of normalised racism on the channel.²⁴

²⁴ #BackaZara was another prominent social media hashtag which developed in 2015 to support Swedish artist Zara Larsson's statements about feminism, where she criticising a festival for only having male acts (Thomsen and Elmervik, 2015).

By using ‘backa’ as a hashtag to support Oatly, the brand itself is made into a political cause to be defended, and Oatly are aligned with these previous champions of causes. Consumers thus work to create this sense of truth for Oatly, and the political issues become attached to the brand, providing immense value for Oatly through these positive associations as championing the truth about dairy production. In describing her motivation for posting about Oatly after the lawsuit on her blog and her Instagram account, one interviewee notes a desire to simultaneously expose the truth of the milk industry, while crediting Oatly for standing up for this truth:

I was angry that they lost and I was angry that people don't realise how the milk industry works [...] I want the courts and I want the system to take this seriously that Oatly shouldn't be punished for telling the truth. (Elin)

Similarly, this convergence of brand and political associations are shown by respondent Malin’s political engagement after the lawsuit. For her, the banned marketing slogans are connected with her own feelings of the truth about cow’s milk, and her desire to take a stand for the vegan cause, leading her to post a video (Appendix D)²⁵ on her Facebook page (*Image 3*).



Image 3:
Facebook post of Mother Pearl's video 'Wow no cow'

²⁵ This was a music video created by Swedish band Mother Pearl (<https://youtu.be/Kro39DRjmck>) and was the winning entry in Oatly's competition for tickets to the Way Out West Festival in Gothenburg. As a result of the court's verdict in November 2015, all mentions of the banned phrases such as 'It's like milk, but made for humans' had to be removed from Oatly's official social media channels or they would incur a fine. Since this video's lyrics include this banned phrase, it had to be removed (Interview, Sara Hansson, Oatly social media manager, 2016).

While talking about the need to spread the truth about milk, Malin's political engagement simultaneously works to maintain public attention for Oatly, solidifying their association with all that the vegan cause embodies:

[Oatly's slogans are] true for me, because for me milk is for the baby cows. So I think it's very strange how it could be illegal to say something like that because milk isn't for humans, from the beginning. How could you ever make it illegal to say the truth? So I think it's very, very strange how you can make it illegal for them to say it.

The way interviewees amalgamate their desire to express the truth about milk production with Oatly's loss in the lawsuit exemplifies the paradox of this voluntary yet exploitative labour that is given freely and enjoyed (Terranova, 2004). While the consumer support for Oatly after the lawsuit is a form of free labour, what we see is a much more nuanced relationship between exploitation and empowerment, where apparent labour is also part of enhancing the broader environmental and vegan cause, thus subverting some of the corporate control and appropriation.

Several interviewees describe their own engagement with the lawsuit as linked to the broader principles of the cause, which was the environment, animal rights and moving away from animal production. In describing her Facebook post that included Oatly's banned slogans (*Image 3*), Malin links this engagement not with a sense of loyalty to the brand itself, but as part of her commitment to animal rights activism, and promoting the vegan cause:

I think it's a kind of activism because it's a cause that matters to me [...] I made the choice to spread the word and to try to open peoples' eyes [...] This cause was not just because of the brand, it was because of the right to say the truth about milk. And I think that's something else [...] even though I like the brand, I like the brand because of the cause.

There is a sense from many of these interviewees that although their online engagement began with the Oatly lawsuit, it moved beyond the brand itself into political engagement that sought to expose the realities of milk-drinking, based in their own regard for the cause. One interviewee describes her motivation for writing an opinion article about the Oatly lawsuit as part of her own ethical position, and not to promote Oatly's brand:

I'm writing this [opinion article] because I care about the environment, that's all [...] you actually can do something just because you care about something. And that's why I've written this. I'm not paid by anyone. It's my free, spare time. (Olivia)

While the degree to which consumers felt motivated to participate with the political issue of milk-drinking because of the lawsuit differs between individuals, it is apparent that this labour is not clear-cut. Jenkins discusses the dual power dynamic of convergence culture, where consumers and corporations simultaneously maintain control (2006:18). On the one hand Oatly benefit from the association with truth manufactured through consumers' online activities, and yet for consumers these combined activities represent political engagement that seeks to raise awareness of causes they feel strongly about. This contradictory nature of corporate gain *and* individual empowerment is a theme which runs throughout this political engagement with the lawsuit.

The duality of emotion as political catalyst and appropriation

This dialectic between corporate value and individual political engagement presents itself again in the way emotion operates in engagement with the lawsuit. Emotion can be seen to hold a dual and contradictory position here, embodying different potential for both the consumers and for Oatly. Labour practices such as writing blog posts about the Oatly lawsuit and sending Tweets are motivated by different reasons by interviewees, one of which was an initial sense of personal outrage and shock following the court's decision. Most interviewees cited their own feelings of bemusement and anger when they heard that Oatly had lost the court case as a reason for their online engagement, as one blogger recalls:

I wrote a blog post about it because I was quite upset because [the court's ruling] was like a joke! It was so insane I thought. Because if there is anyone that is having false advertising it is definitely the milk industry [...] I just wanted to highlight the irony of the ones that have been lobbying for something so bad and have made us think that we need something we don't need - and they think that Oatly said something bad about them. But they haven't! And that's what's so insane. (Olivia)

This kind of emotional spark was a common feeling among interviewees, feeding into their own political engagement with the debate over cow's milk versus plant milk on social media, mainstream media and blogs. In one way, this form of emotional work via online content creation and social media participation demonstrates the economic value of emotions, where emotional labour comes to

serve in creating public promotion for Oatly. But in another way, the role of individual passion and affect is a central component in inspiring political engagement (Dahlgren, 2009:83).

The concept of an emotional economy has become a prominent marketing trend, highlighting the interest in fostering personal and affective connections with consumers for commercial benefit (e.g. Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Zwick et al. argue that co-creative labour is premised upon brands attaining economic value from the 'affective labour' of consumers (2008:166). Thus, the feelings of anger and shock which motivated interviewees to produce content about Oatly's loss serve as advertising for their brand across a myriad of platforms, symbolising valuable organic promotion desired by brand cultures, built on 'authentic participation of consumers' (Banet-Weiser, 2012:46).

Since consumers themselves produced this content on their own blogs, websites and social media accounts, their emotional engagement is turned into the economically-valuable word-of-mouth marketing for Oatly (Kozinets et al., 2010). For Oatly, this kind of organic content production based in the manifested emotions of consumers can be translated directly into economic and symbolic brand value in the same way that political engagement with the truth dually worked to bolster Oatly's brand image.

However, the emotional reactions experienced by these individuals as a result of the court's decision can also be seen as an affective catalyst for both individual and collective political action. A common emotion described by interviewees was a strong sense of shock and confusion over the verdict:

Never ever, I could never think that they could lose! So I don't believe it's true actually, it's very strange. I can't understand why they lost, I can't understand it! (Malin)

The final outcome I was surprised about, because I think that that was like really stuck in the back for the rights of saying things in Sweden. It's like this is Russia, twenty years ago, suddenly. It's like how could this happen? This is not right. (Patrik)

Both of these interviewees participated multiple times online by posting about the lawsuit on their own Facebook pages, in community Facebook pages and also creating crowd funding cases. Castells highlights the significance of individual emotion in igniting political action, stating '[a]t the individual level, social movements are emotional movements...the big bang of a social movement starts

with the transformation of emotion into action.’ (2012:13). Here we see individual emotion playing a key role in prompting these people to engage with the lawsuit, but also with the wider community through their online activities, attempting to highlight the injustice of the legal system and the milk industry, supporting Dahlgren’s statement that ‘Passion not only motivates, it links people together.’ (2009:86).

Castells echoes this position, highlighting the importance of communication processes to boost these initial individual feelings and connect them to the wider movement made up of other individuals with shared outrage (2012:15). As one interviewee Olivia notes, fuelled by anger at the decision, she wrote two opinion articles about the politics of milk-drinking in national newspapers, as well as engaging with social media, saying ‘I tweeted like a maniac!’ With Olivia’s engagement the existence of the emotional drivers, facilitated by connected, interactive communication platforms allowed her to share her feelings with others over the negatives of cow’s milk, while also contributing to the political community.

Instead of seeing this as a pure commercial appropriation of emotion for its connection to a private company, this engagement through commodity culture can be seen to ‘form communities of consumers who are bound together by affect and emotion’ (Banet-Weiser, 2012:218). This shared sense of emotion created through Oatly’s lawsuit worked to bring people together and facilitate political discussions about milk-drinking. Interviewees described the way they were able to relate to others because of a similar emotional reaction of disbelief about the lawsuit, producing a kind of ‘shared history’ (Banet-Weiser, 2012:219) within this brand culture and equally through political engagement:

[the lawsuit] was a big deal and people were talking about it everywhere, at my work, at parties [...] because we all thought it was unbelievable that it happened, we were shocked. (Mathilda)

The lawsuit then serves as a catalyst for propelling the politics of milk-drinking to the next level, and allowing individuals to share their own feelings of anger with others and connect to the wider vegan movement through the networked space of the internet. While this political engagement also serves as labour in constructing the brand identity of Oatly through an appropriation of these feelings for commercial gain, interviewees show that their emotion extends to promoting the wider political issues of milk consumption and freedom of expression. On these grounds, it would seem that commodity activism in this

context is not a shallow form of political engagement, but rather has potential in inciting individual political action that enhances the broader social movement through emotion.

Subverting labour through personalised political engagement

There is a strong sense from interviewees that their sharing practices and content creation during the lawsuit were contingent upon how it related to *their own* needs, as well as how Oatly's position in this lawsuit aligned with *their* political stance on milk-drinking. Consumers' desire to share their politics and feelings with others shows a subversion of exploitative labour, where Oatly as a *concept* is used as a customisable toolbox by consumers, and as an opening for participating and sharing their political views in unique ways.

During the lawsuit, supporters of Oatly started an online initiative to collect money to pay for Oatly's legal fees using a crowd funding website. This website 'Real Opinion', was created by Patrik as a platform for social action, and is a web platform where individuals can create their own cases based on social or political causes, to spread awareness and raise money to help their issue. As well as creating the overall website, Patrik also decided to create a case on the website to raise money for Oatly (Image 4), which he then publicised by sharing links in vegan Facebook groups and through other social media channels such as Twitter.



Image 4

Fundraising case for Oatly on Real Opinion²⁶

²⁶ image credit: realopinion-se.loopiasecure.com

Patrik's creation of a case to raise money for Oatly, and the individuals who engaged with it by donating money can be seen as an operation of 'co-creative labour' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Zwick et al., 2008) drawing the skilled labour of consumers into the value production of the brand. Oatly's social media manager Sara recalls this activity, and the feeling of the company employees being both impressed and overwhelmed: 'Some people actually started initiative where they wanted to raise money for us [...] we couldn't take it of course, but either way it was really cool to see [...] it's crazy to see.'

However, the concept of supporter labour here moves from simple repetition and sharing of Oatly's content as free advertising, into the sphere of personal gain, and that of a toolbox to suit different individual needs. Gauntlett notes that this kind of amateur participation is carried out by individuals 'because they have a message or meaning that they wish to share with others, and a desire to make their mark on the world in some way.' (2014:7) Patrik described the way he created a fundraising case for Oatly as a way of promoting Real Opinion and capitalising on the exposure surrounding the lawsuit:

I was like, no, this is a Real Opinion thing. I'm just using your brand and your commercial and everything to make a bit of fuss about Real Opinion. And also because I think that what happened to you is not okay.

Patrik demonstrates an awareness of his own labour in creating this fundraising case, prioritising his own personal gains and political engagement over blindly defending Oatly. His desire to 'fight for' Oatly is not based in the strong bond he feels for the brand, and indignation over their trial becomes a mere afterthought. His appropriation of Oatly's lawsuit and capitalising on the public momentum of the trial highlights an individualistic mode of political engagement, but one that is equally based in a desire to contribute to social change, and encourage others to participate:

I would say that this was the biggest case in real opinion's history [fundraising for Oatly], of the amount of people caring and really voting and giving money. Still it was not that much, but it was interesting to see that this was engaging people, this was something that made them take the step and start sharing.

His creation of the Real Opinion website and also the Oatly case on this site for him is a way of sharing political ideas and helping to promote engagement with others, reflecting small, connected action that cannot be categorised as mere labour (Gauntlett, 2014:7):

It's a crowd funding site for everyone who wants to make small difference [...] I started to build this tool on the internet where people can start up what they want to change and how they will change it, and then start to share it [...] it's like a direct democracy to make small changes, not later but now. (Patrik)

For individual political engagement, this can be seen as a positive example of the kind of diverse and personal use of platforms to connect to other politically-minded people. We see this same personalised individual engagement with the #BackaOatly hashtag use, fusing both a sense of individual expression with motivations to share political opinions. #BackaOatly allows for numerous openings for personal expression and creativity, through the call to photograph and share individual food pictures, while the inclusion of the hashtags links to the overall campaign.

One of the things that makes this form of political content sharing so effective to the overall movement according to Bennett and Segerberg, are these 'personal action frames' (2012:743-5), where political content can be easily customised by individuals when sharing. In this sense, personal micro engagement becomes connected to the macro political cause of ethical food production and veganism. One interviewee discusses the way sharing images and participating with #BackaOatly helps her demonstrate what she personally stands for, and what she can do as an individual to connect to the political:

I've been thinking a lot about how I can live my life to support the things that I stand for [...] maybe that's one of the parts of putting this hashtag #BackaOatly - to do something small from the beginning, and then maybe make something bigger out of it. (Elin)

Although interviewees recognise that these personalised actions are small, they still hold meaning for both their own individual political engagement and the wider causes, reflecting Gauntlett's assertion that 'small steps into a changed world are better than no steps.' (2014:2). Enhanced by communication technologies, Elin's participation with #BackaOatly on her blog and Instagram account help to close the gap between micro, individual action and the imagined political community (Bennett, 2012:28).

Similar to political consumerism these are active political participants, and they are interested in a variety of intersecting political issues (Baek, 2010:1079). While demonstrating the connective action of supporters' political engagement (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012), individuals participating with #BackaOatly show that they

engage with multiple causes at once, underscoring the diversity of their maximalist political engagement (Carpentier, 2011). The hashtag use serves to combine and connect this cause to other political causes, for example #BackaOatly is frequently used in conjunction with #Vegan (Image 5), creating an ‘intertextual chain’ (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015:5).

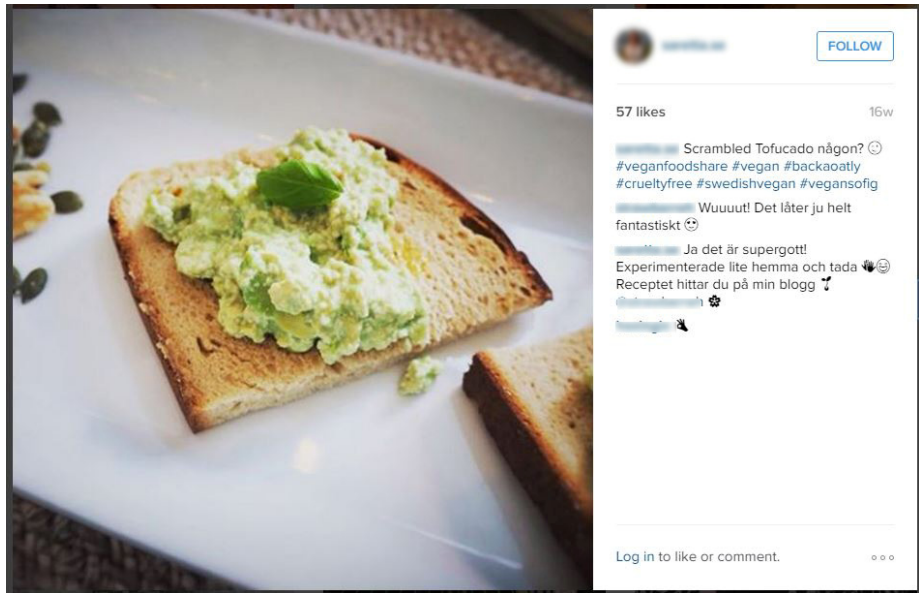


Image 5:
Use of ‘intertextual chains’ through multiple hashtags

With the intertextual chain of hashtags like these, the sense of collective action for the vegetarian/vegan movement is enhanced. In the same way that these interviewees see their individual food purchasing habits as part of a collective vegan effort, online individual activity can also be seen as a way of engaging with the movement beyond the immediate, personal space. Maurer (2002) notes that for many vegetarians, they feel connected to the overall movement through their own food habits and the knowledge that others are also participating in the same way, leading to a sense of collective activity.

Thus, the criticism of commodity activism for being single-issue (e.g. Littler, 2009) and too focused on the individual (e.g. Maniates, 2001) is untrue for this case, where individuals show that they are active participants, creating connections with intersecting political causes. These diverse, personal and connected forms of

political engagement show that labour is reconceptualised as a win-win in this case. Labour is both appropriated by Oatly to gain brand exposure and value, but equally, individuals' awareness of participating with branded spaces and the many unique ways they engage *through* and *beyond* the brand resists a top-down domination and control.

In Duffy's study of commodity activism she notes a similar consumer awareness, highlighting the fact that power in this corporate/consumer relationship is not straightforward, and that 'the traditional *either* empowerment *or* exploitation framework might not be the most productive' (2010:40, original emphasis). Many interviewees demonstrate their primary motivation is to enhance the political cause for the environment and for animal rights, refuting claims of the negative individualism of commodity activism. The nuanced perspectives these individuals possess over the motivations for their online activity signals real potential for this form of political engagement.

Concluding reflections

The relationship between Oatly and their consumers is characterised by a push-and-pull tension, and a struggle for control over expression and power, illustrating that consumer labour here moves away from binary conceptions of exploiter versus exploited. Within each theme, the duality of political engagement becomes apparent, where individual participation and emotion operates simultaneously as brand work for Oatly *and* as a personal way to enhance the vegan and animal rights cause.

The unique interconnected ways that interviewees draw on Oatly's brand forms a dynamic kind of activism, situated within consumer culture and yet critiquing it; one that is multi-site and maximalist (Carpentier, 2011). Strongly aided by digital media platforms, commodity activism can be seen here as a customisable toolbox, where individuals use Oatly to suit individual needs and absorb the nuances and levels of engagement. These individuals move between offline and online spaces fluidly, using both as tools for their own form of political engagement and activism.

For many interviewees, Oatly is a symbol to be used in vegan outreach, and a talking point for critiquing the milk industry and highlighting the availability of alternatives. In these ways, commodity activism can be viewed positively, helping

to facilitate micro individual engagement that connects to the macro global vegan and environmental movement online. However, what this analysis also reveals is the added danger of political engagement that is inextricably linked to consumer culture, and thus reliant on market logic to legitimise the kinds of interactions that can take place.

Risks of commodity activism: Exclusion and impact

Oatly's exclusion of unwanted militant vegans is one example of the downside to political engagement through consumption, showing that if undesirable groups do not fit the image of the brand, and thus the company's profitability, this severely limits who can and cannot participate through commodity activism.

Since the vegan movement (and the animal rights movement by extension) hinges on changing consumption and food production practices, it must necessarily intersect with commodity culture, and thus its ability to politically engage others relies on private food companies like Oatly to maintain and assist the movement. As Cherry notes, veganism is inherently a cultural movement which is 'based on everyday practices in one's lifestyle' (2006:155-6). It means the power to allow participation sits firmly with the dominant group - the market and the company - raising implications for both individual political engagement as well as the types of political causes that are branded as 'safe politics' (Banet-Weiser, 2012:148).

Similarly, the fact that this activism relies on consumption, where political engagement is premised on purchasing power, individuals who cannot afford to participate with niche consumption are automatically excluded. As studies of the US and Europe have shown, there are strong disparities within political consumption, for example, political engagement with food purchasing is more likely to involve people with higher education (Yates, 2011) and be connected with higher class status (Baek, 2010). This is a potential problem for commodity activism in the broader sense, as Carpentier notes, participation is a way of balancing power between elite groups and citizens, thus allowing all citizens an equal voice (2011:23).

The nature of this project to investigate political engagement was contingent upon interviewing people who were already consumers of Oatly products, thus the respondents were those who had the means to be regular purchasers of these products. While this can be seen as a limitation of the study, it also would seem to correspond to the global trend of political consumption as a privileged practice. Further research into the correlation between economic status and social

background and this kind of political engagement would be extremely useful in evaluating the universality of commodity activist practices in Sweden.

Commodity activism's confluence of individual consumption with responsible political engagement is therefore at risk of maintaining inequalities by placing power with corporations and income level. If political action is only permitted to those who can afford to participate, those who do not threaten the brand image, engaging with politics through food consumption proves problematic. Access is thus a key issue to keep in mind when it comes to the ability to participate through consumption in the same way as access to online technology is not universal. As Fuchs reminds us, only 34.3% of the world's population use the internet (2012:776), therefore it should not be presumed that the grounds for political participation through these evolving modes of engagement are equal for everyone.

This digital divide is also present in Sweden, where one in four people have been shown to have very low computer literacy, and although national access to the internet is high, this is unevenly distributed across age brackets (Internetstiftelsen i Sverige, 2015). People over the age of 65 generally have less access to the internet than younger age groups, they feel less confident using the internet, and particularly social media (ibid). Since this kind of commodity activism is so intertwined with digital media, the views of those without the required digital competencies and internet access will become marginalised. These issues of access are a problem for both offline commodity activism and online political engagement as they could sediment elite class power.

Further, for both online and offline participation of this kind, the issues over sustainability of these political activities as well as long-term impacts must be raised (Dahlgren, 2009:194). It is easy to dismiss the small-scale actions of these interviewees, such as writing blog posts about the lawsuit and joining Twitter campaigns to raise awareness about unethical milk production, as overly fragmented and without lasting political impact. As is often the criticism of the fleeting nature of digital media activities for contributing to political change, a combination of these with commodity activism can be seen as a lesser form of political engagement, and one that is too individualistic.

What this case shows is that small-scale political actions *do* hold meaning, not just for the individuals involved but also for the wider political cause. All consumers interviewed connected their activities to a broader politics, outside of their immediate consumption, advocacy and personal social media actions. Whether this was animal rights, environmentalism, veganism, feminism or a combination,

these interviewees demonstrated a mindfulness of politics beyond their individual engagement and meaning-making.

Therefore, in responding to criticisms of commodity activism's prioritisation of the individual over the collective movement and its transience (e.g. Schudson, 2006), this case shows the potential of this kind of engagement. Interviewees here illustrate that their engagement through commodity activism makes up one part of their diverse, connected political activity. The relationship with consumption habits for many of these individuals is not seen as negative, but rather part of their conscious, ongoing engagement with their ethical principles. As both Cherry (2006) and Haenfler et al. (2012) identify, the dependence on everyday lifestyle of seemingly fragmented social movements like veganism results in an ongoing and integrated participation with politics, through these daily consumption practices.

Expanding political engagement: An everyday entry point

This kind of commodity activism through a brand like Oatly does not replace other forms of political engagement, such as caring about multiple causes and acting through more than one digital platform. Rather, it brings the political into the everyday sphere as well as continuing to encourage political engagement with a broader set of ideals, and interviewees show that this is one added component of their activism. A recurring thread in the analysis of the interview data was consumers' sense of reflexivity over their own role as activists, and also about the strategies of the animal rights and vegan movements. Many interviewees discussed the need to 'do what you can' for the movement, whether that was using the Oatly lawsuit or products as a talking point about the ethics of cow's milk, or sharing content online.

Their thoughts reflect Baek's findings (2012:1079-80) that consumerism as political engagement offers one tool or entry point to politics among other forms of engagement, and does not supplant other forms of political activity. Interviewees see their interaction through Oatly as small-scale and personal, but as an important contribution to the animal rights movement. This kind of maximalist participation (Carpentier, 2011) shows the shifting spaces for political engagement, and that for many of the interviewees, doing political activism is not limited by traditional notions of political engagement, or by dominant groups such as corporations.

These activities and individual awareness highlight the value in political engagement with brands, since in this case Oatly's lawsuit acted as a catalyst for deeper, widespread political engagement. Rather than restricting political participation because of its connection to profit and seeing it as a commercialisation of political ideals, consumer activism negotiates top-down power from Oatly through a creative and diverse fusion of online and offline engagement, using the product as a talking point. Gauntlett's assertion that 'real change begins in homes, and workplaces, in the terrain of everyday life' (2014:11) is reflected by these individuals' activities and discussions.

Through the customisable use of both online tools and the products themselves they attempt to create change within their own lives, building their political agenda into their personal environments and attempting to reach out to others. Brands like Oatly can thus help to lower barriers to political participation through the daily use of accessible alternative products, and functioning as a conversation-starter online, and through this ease of use, allowing individuals to develop their own form of activism. As one interviewee remarked:

The reason I'm doing my blog and a lot of social media about my opinions is because I want to practise to become better at participating in discussions overall... This is mostly how I choose to do my activism. (Josefine)

Jenkins' discussion of accessing politics through non-traditional avenues like popular culture can be extended here, as he states 'these forms...also have political effect, representing hybrid spaces where we can lower the political stakes (and change the language of politics) enough so that we can master skills we need to be participants in the democratic process.' (Jenkins, 2006:209) For individuals like Josefine, she stands to benefit from a broadening of the notion of political engagement into spheres like brand culture and new media, allowing her avenues to master skills of political participation.

This idea of a gateway, and a means of opening a wider political dialogue is also reflected in the way Oatly's lawsuit resulted in widespread public engagement with the politics of milk, including national and local newspapers, across social media and radio. Regardless of its affiliation with commercial motives, this lawsuit sparked extensive debate and discussion which moved beyond the brand and enabled a variety of voices to be heard, especially people who might not otherwise have participated or been aware of this issue.

A shared battleground?

While there are tensions and disagreements between Oatly and many of the vegan community, in speaking at length with both parties, it seems that their ultimate goals are the same – to encourage a shift to sustainable and ethical plant-based foods, while eliminating the need for animal agriculture. Both seek political change through food activism, acknowledging the central role of consumption patterns and thus food companies in this struggle. Consumerism here becomes a shared battleground, even though there are different layers to each party's motivations for encouraging change.

There is optimism in the way *both* Oatly and the consumers speak of a need for an evolving, positive form of vegan and environmental engagement, suggesting that the strategies employed by these movements are already in flux, and an activism that draws on market logic as one dynamic element holds potential. Oatly's need to distance themselves from 'radical' vegan communication, for them comes from wanting to reach a mainstream group without adopting tactics that they view as alienating. Several vegan consumers also seem to agree with the need for a revised vegan activism, one that is based in positive examples and encourages active, conscious consumption, signalling a common agenda:

I think we should talk about it like 'oh look at my new bag' or have these blogs or Instagram accounts. But by being too harsh, then I think you lose. So I think I would lose if I would be *that* kind of activist. (Elin)

The diverse political engagement demonstrated by these consumers, fusing commodity activism with the power of the networked space signals a shift towards an adaptable, fluid form of political engagement. The role of private enterprises like Oatly in this engagement is still up for debate, but it would seem that harnessing some of the power of commodity culture holds benefits for both individual participation and to enhance existing political movements. While it is in Oatly's economic benefit to increase plant-milk consumption, employees overwhelmingly spoke about the need to make broader changes to the food system, as well as questioning the prominent position of cow's milk in Swedish society:

But old tradition, the animal perspective, the animal organisation part is much stronger [...] It's slowly changing but it's also up to us and the consumer demand to make vegetable products more worth. (Carina, sustainability manager of Oatly)

Consumers similarly reflect on the need for changes to come from private companies, since veganism is rooted in consumption, raising questions over whether the ‘battle’ against tradition and animal agriculture will be fought *with* the help of companies rather than against them.

Consumption is the biggest part of veganism. Well it's certainly the biggest battle we have, because with 60 billion lives being taken each year, the effectiveness of the consumption being changed is undeniable. (Daniel)

Answering the call from scholars addressing alternative forms of political engagement to investigate the interaction of these complex power relations, rather than look at the binary positions of exploitation versus engagement (e.g. Banet-Weiser, 2012; Bennett, 2012; Johnston and Cairns, 2012), this research highlights the nuanced, complex way in which individuals engage with commodity activism. It has looked specifically at where the motivations of corporations like Oatly clash with individual and collective political engagement, revealing the hierarchies of power that appear throughout this relationship.

This is an intriguing and developing area of study that would benefit from further research into aspects such as the impact of class and education on participation, and additional case examples, which would deepen our understanding of how commodity activism operates within the situated Swedish context. Faced with the combination of a rapidly changing climate and the constant expansion of private enterprises, individual and collective action for political and social change may well be fought through these branded battlegrounds.

While this case has illustrated several risks of political engagement through consumption, and these issues of exclusion are important to keep in mind, what it also shows is a diverse, dynamic political engagement where individuals create meaning for themselves and connect with their political agendas. The future and lasting impact of these kinds of activities are still uncertain, but aided by an array of digital technology, commodity activism can be seen here as one instrument of individual political engagement; contradictory and customisable, simultaneously critiquing consumer culture and yet operating within it.

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‘Zara’, 2016. Interview with A. McCrow-Young [telephone], 16 February.

Appendix A: Interview guides

Interview Guide: “Consumers”

Themes:

Your experiences and interactions with Oatly

The lawsuit with LRF

Oatly’s marketing strategies and values

Your social media habits around political discussions

Your political activism/activities

Questions:

Do you remember when you first heard about Oatly? What happened then?

Would you say you’re a supporter of Oatly?

Do you buy their products frequently?

Do you follow Oatly on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram?

What makes you want to support Oatly?

Have you contacted Oatly directly in some way? (social media etc.)

What do you like about Oatly? What don’t you like about Oatly?

What did you think about the lawsuit between Oatly and LRF Mjölks?

Did you join any discussion about the lawsuit?

If so, how did you participate with this debate?

Why did you feel moved to join the discussion?

What do you think of Oatly’s marketing?

Do you perceive these messages as genuine?

Do you believe that they “stand for” something? What is that?

What do you think of Oatly’s agenda and “values”?

Discuss milk drinking. What does it mean to you?

Do you normally participate in political discussions? Have you been involved with any kind of activism before?

What are some of your social media habits? (Do you use it often, and in what way?)

Interview Guide: Employees

Themes:

Oatly's consumers/community

The lawsuit with LRF

Oatly's marketing strategies and values

"Lifestyle branding"

Plant milk context and political values

Questions:

What is your role and what do your daily activities include?

Can you please talk about your current marketing and communication strategy? (social media outreach, marketing and the re-branding)?

Were there any issues/problems encountered when you launched this new brand image? If you compare the situation now to before you first started, what are the main differences and similarities? Different ways of working with consumers and suppliers now and before?

Can you please talk about Oatly's consumers/supporters – what is your impression of them?

How would you describe your followers (on social media)?

What values do you think they share? (Are those the same as the ones Oatly wants to associate with?)

What does "lifestyle brand" mean to you?

What do you think these shared "values" are?

What is your interaction with the vegan/animal rights communities? How important is it for you to connect with communities like these?

Can you talk briefly about the lawsuit; your experiences, the consumers' response to this etc.?

Can you expand on your approach to Oatly's consumers

What was the public reaction like, and why do you think it was like this?

Why do think all these supporters feel moved to reach out to you?

What do you perceive the role of food companies like Oatly is in these debates?

What is your view on milk as a political and a media issue in Sweden?

Appendix B: Data coding example

	Interviewee			
	Elin	Daniel	Olivia	Erik
Critical consumption/educating through food examples	"I was writing, yeah we need to support them by buying their products, by showing them how the people not saying "oh this my oat milk" But yeah maybe buying them and having them at work and put them in the coffee just so people can see it. So they see that it's a good alternative, and maybe they want to taste it or put it on social media, on Instagram or Facebook"	"Many times when I've been drinking Oatly people have been intrigued and asking about stuff. If I'm going out for coffee with some friends and I get oat milk, they're like "I'll try that - oh it actually tastes good!" So I think that's one of the best ways to talk about veganism, because they try it and maybe it'll change their habits."	"I think they have nice products and they try to develop new products which I think is great because the more that comes to the market, the bigger the possibilities that even more people go from cow milk to this kind of products. Like Alpro launched a week or two ago, "kvarg" People want it and now there's a vegetarian alternative, and I think every alternative that comes to the market is good because more people finds out the way of living without animal stuff"	"I do think if we're going to create a vegan world which is my vision, we need alternatives. Good alternatives."
	"when I find things that you can find in the grocery shop or when you find shoes in H & M, I want to write about it, so I want to show them that you can also buy some things in regular stores"	"If you want to get people to shift it's to not ask them to become vegan, it's to provide better products that make a vegan lifestyle happen without them having to identify as one I think"		
Use of digital media/combined with offline activism	"people start asking, and they're curious and they're interested so eventually it will be, I think eventually people will see anyway. I think we should talk about it, like "oh look at my new bag" or have these blogs or Instagram accounts. But by being too harsh, then I think you lose. So I think I would lose if I would be that kind of activist"		"I'm both me myself as Olivia is on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, and a bit of Pinterest, not much but I try to be on all platforms... I use them regularly for both me and as Vego Eco, I post some posts like at least two or three posts a day at Twitter and one a day at Facebook."	"I don't buy that something is real, and something is not real, because it is real even if it's something online [...] you don't know what will be most effective [...] it's also good to go in different places and you can use the same kind of material to different kind of target groups, different platforms, different media outlets."

Appendix C: Vegan statement on oat milk packaging by Oatly

“Yes, we are vegan. So?

Sometimes it feels so unfair. Being a minority, different, an alternative, the irritating small guy poking the big giant with a pointy stick and whispering:

Hey big baller, wake up. Times are changing.

What that has to do with us being vegan, we have no idea. But since we are back on the subject, we should probably add that us being one is something we are very proud of. There’s nothing in any of our products that has anything to do with the animal kingdom. Yet we are perfectly nutritious and full of goodness. Amazing yet completely logical.” (Oatly, 2014)

Appendix D: Facebook post by consumer

Text written by interviewee Malin in her Facebook post following the court’s ruling against Oatly.

Original (Swedish):

“De förbjudna orden ska fortsätta sjungas!

Oatly tystades ner av mjölklobbyn genom Marknadsdomstolen (och en mjölkdrinkande domare). Oatly får inte längre skriva eller säga "It's like milk, but made for humans". Det anses fel att antyda att mjölken är till för kalven.

Tack och lov har det gjorts covers, på sången som Oatly själva inte längre får sprida. Jag gillar den här versionen av Motherpearl!

Sprid, eller gör din egen cover!

Låt inte mjölklobbyn få sista ordet!

Dela de förbjudna orden! Dela den förbjudna sången!

Dela glädjen över att Oatly ändå har rätt och att mjölklobbyn inte kan tysta folket.”

Translation:

“The forbidden words will continue to be sung!

Oatly was hushed up by the milk lobby by the Market Court (and milk-drinking judges). Oatly may no longer write or say, "It's like milk, but made for humans". It is wrong to imply that the milk is for calves.

Thankfully, there have been cover songs, the song that Oatly themselves can no longer spread. I like this version by Motherpearl!

Spread, or make your own cover!

Do not let the milk lobby get the last word!"

Share the banned words! Share the forbidden song!

Share the joy of Oatly still have the right and the dairy lobby cannot silence the people.

Media Literacy in Mexico

Towards a critical pluralist approach

Alfonso Méndez Forsell

Introduction

Media education has to face the challenge of meeting the needs of a world in constant motion. It has become commonplace to say that the world is shrinking due to globalization, and the contribution that the media have had in this perceptual shift cannot be overstated. Changing times have brought new needs and requirements from media education. As mass media and other forms of mediated communication grow ever more ubiquitous in societies across these regions, envisaging and defining the points where media and education can join paths becomes an increasingly important endeavour. In both formal and informal educational settings across the world, mediated communication has turned into an essential pedagogic constituent.

Media literacy in Mexico and Latin America is in a pivotal moment. For decades there has been an interest in Latin America in media education and ensuing endeavours to bring together a field composed by a multiplicity of approaches mostly rooted in audience reception studies. More prominently in the late 1970's Brazilian scholars managed to round up media education colleagues scattered throughout the Latin American region under the umbrella term of 'educommunication'. Despite continual cooperation, the translation from Portuguese to Spanish and vice versa has proven to be a hurdle.

More recently, with the backing of UNESCO and a host of other organizations, Spanish-speaking scholars have been shifting in the direction of 'media literacy',

an umbrella term that embraces a much broader enterprise of media education. The US and Europe represent important regions for media literacy, where the scholarship and curricula experiences have had more time to spread their wings. In this line, the literature review chapter will rely on these regional examples as theoretical and experiential benchmarks.

This research will argue that in Mexico, the main site of this research, media education cannot afford to ignore civic and democratic matters. Media literacy as an object of study acquires its relevance by dint of the country's concentrated media landscape, but furthermore this research will show how the secondary civic duties that media education may have in other parts, become a prerequisite in Mexico. In such a convulsed setting, where the educational system is undergoing a reorganization along administrative rather than pedagogical lines, and pressing matters to governance and democracy such as corruption, private and public accountability, the on-going violence related to drug trade, the devaluation of the currency and volatile commodity markets dominate policy agendas, this project aims to demonstrate the contributions that media literacy education can make to strengthen citizen participation and rearrange the dominant logic that posits elites as the exclusive guarantors in control of such affairs.

Through the insight of elite interviews with people who are at the forefront of media literacy in Mexico, this thesis has identified a gap in research: media literacy in these regions, as promoted by UNESCO, lacks a robust civic thrust. The thesis will focus on this absence and attempt to fill the gap by studying the current media landscape in Mexico, while taking into account its context as well as the broader economic and social processes that determine it. In order to complete the picture, this project will then set out to study the current state of media literacy in Mexico as part of a wider Latin American movement. This two-way journey will allow this research to tie in current media affairs in Mexico related to democracy with media literacy.

The stark finding that media literacy policies do not exist in Mexico gives this project the opportunity to demonstrate *why* the experience of media literacy could be significant, and *how* it could be tailored to the particular needs of this context. As such, this project will draw a parallel with civic education: if civic education in schools seeks to teach the emerging citizens about democratic matters, media literacy education in Mexico could engage with democratic affairs that directly involve the media. An example of this is media policymaking, an object of study that will be of significant relevance throughout the research.

The overall aim of this research is to determine how media literacy can provide publics with the insights and critical knowledge to exercise their citizenship by participating in democratic affairs that involve the media - understood as part of broader political, cultural and economic structures - in the Mexican context. The questions this thesis sets out to answer are:

1. What are the connections between media literacy and democracy?
2. Why is media literacy absent in the Mexican media system?
3. How can media literacy provide alternative strategies to critique and change the market ideology of the Mexican media and political landscape?
4. How can media literate publics contribute to democratic affairs that involve the media, thus encouraging greater civic participation?

This research will set out by exploring critical perspectives found in the conjunction between media, democracy and education by ushering in relevant discussions, theoretical concepts and benchmarks. This section will not limit itself to providing an overview of the existing perspectives on the main topics of this study. Instead, it will offer a synthesis and analysis of the literature while being mindful of the context. The themes guiding these discussions will be the concentration and pluralism of media ownership, the prominence of broadcast television, the digital, cultural and socioeconomic divides, the alienating character of policymaking, the liberal market-oriented ideology of the media system, the implications of an agonistic approach to democracy as an alternative, media literacy as a construct, and the hopeful notion of media literacy education as an alternative to the ineffectiveness of regulation.

The third chapter will present the methodological commitments that underpin this research, and report in more detail the research design. The thesis uses qualitative interviews as a primary method, supplemented with policy, political and economic analysis of the Mexican media system. The chapter will then weigh in the specific advantages that the elite interview method brings to this research, and the rewards of gathering first-hand data from relevant social and political actors in Mexico. This will be followed by a description of how this research carried out the sample resulting in the depiction of the interview process. To complete the chapter, a reflection about methodological considerations and limits will ensue, including the position of power held by the respondents and their geographic distance.

The fourth chapter will revisit the discussions and concepts explored in the second chapter and gauge them against the data and new findings that emerged from the interviews. This will allow the research to situate the discussions and ideas within the context of Mexico. By taking this path, the analysis will advance towards a political and multifaceted approach to media education suited to engage with issues and struggles inherent to the heterogeneous and complex media environment in Mexico. The analysis will culminate by setting the groundwork for a model of media literacy committed to the vision of a normative critical-pluralist understanding of democracy concerned with citizens who can participate in a media landscape that is grounded in the basic values of political and economic liberalism.

As stated, the theoretical framework will draw on research developed for the most part in the US and Europe, where the term ‘media literacy’ has been in circulation for decades, but the novel adoption of this specific term in Latin America places this research at the forefront of media literacy debates in Mexico, making a contribution to knowledge in media literacy as sensitive to regional differences, situated contexts and most importantly as a strategic intervention into media and democracy.

Critical perspectives on media, democracy and education

More and more, media literacy is regarded as an important field for the conduct of civic learning. In increasingly mediatized societies, media literacy can provide people with the critical resources they need to understand, engage and, if necessary, as we will see may be the case in Mexico, to challenge the media that have become an integral part of their daily lives (Buckingham, 2007). It is in this spirit that this thesis emphasizes the importance of media education as part of a more general form of democratic citizenship. Such approach requires an exploration of how the media are enclosed in broader social, economic and institutional contexts of communication and politics.

In this chapter, the research will adopt a top-down approach when delving into concepts, ideas and contexts that are important to understand the conditions that media literacy education has to face in Mexico. One section will examine the theoretical background of media policies that deal with issues of democracy; a

latter section will critically look at the idea of media literacy education as an alternative to regulation, theoretically establishing media literacy model based on a normative radical-pluralist understanding of democracy for students –the emerging citizens– to critically navigate a media landscape that is grounded in fundamental values of political and economic liberalism.

Media concentration

The reason why media ownership concentration is an important issue to examine for the general aim of this project is that, in any large society, the media probably constitute the most vital institutional structure of the public sphere (Baker, 2007). This follows that democracy implies a wide dispersal of power within public discourse offers universal opportunities to present preferences, views and visions.

A good part of the literature dedicated to democratization of the media rests on the following premise: media concentration is anti-democratic (Freedman, 2014; Noam, 2007; Baker, 2007). The claim that the concentration of media ownership contradicts the central principles of democracy is almost universal (Barnnet, 2010), and as such pluralism and diversity have been historically emphasized in policies statements in Europe and the US. It is established among media concentration critics that more recent policy initiatives have moved towards chipping away restrictions in favour of greater consolidation (Barnnet, 2010; Freedman, 2014).

Others reject such pessimistic accounts and believe that market and technological forces are breaking open the barriers to a flowering period of media and information (Noam, 2009). Opponents of media concentration in advanced western democracies fear effects as what is referred to as the ‘Berlusconi’ effect. According to Baker (2007:18), dispersal of ownership structurally prevents scenarios such as this from happening, where the Italian media mogul used his massive media power to catapult himself into the Prime Minister position for two periods. Later we will review the historical conditions that made these episodes commonplace in Latin American media systems.

Many scholars of media concentration emphasize pluralism and diversity of media as a foundation for democracy, about media content and its impact on citizens, and about the potentially irresponsible power of the few over the many. Noam (2009) alerts us that the prevalence of media concentrations trends around the world might have more fundamental forces at work than media moguls such as Murdoch, the Azcárraga family in Mexico or Berlusconi.

Picard and Dal Zotto (2015:56), claim that, conceptually, ownership itself is not good or bad, and consider that different forms of ownerships have different advantages and disadvantages with different outcomes that can be good or bad. For them, the determinant problem with current complaints about ownership is that they have nothing to do with ownership, but rather the commercialized pursuit of media. However, this way of framing issues of media ownership seems to recoil from broader democratic debates. A number of political and media scholars consider that this form of de-politicized debates happens within the framework of a naturalized neoliberal project and global market forces (Mouffe, 2005; Raeijmackers and Maesele, 2015). Previous ideological struggles between 'right and left' have now taken a rationalizing and moralizing turn dealing with what is 'right and wrong'.

A rationalized approach to media concentration is adopted by Noam (2009), who in an attempt to give closure to the debate on whether media are becoming controlled by the few and closed to the many in the US, delivers an impressively comprehensive research on media ownership providing measurements and numbers ("facts"). His approach is in direct opposition to what several media scholars maintain: empirically-based statistical evidence by itself offers an illusory belief that quantifiable facts can give answers to normative questions, such as media quality, social responsibility, pluralism and diversity (Baker, 2007; Freedman, 2014; Karppinen, 2015).

This gap represents one of the most fundamental ruptures in media ownership research and policy-making. Even if media policy is not focused on matters of economic efficiency (Noam, 2009), issues concerning industry concentration and market structure are often dominated by lawyers, economists and business analysts who privilege empirical data at the expense of developing a more comprehensive approach (Freedman, 2014). To a lot critics of media ownership, the debate's central focus is not whether the media are concentrated or not, in contrast to Noam's well-documented argument, but rather on the implications of media systems that privilege particular ways of assessing and ordering the world. To Baker (2007:8), the principle of distribution of media ownership is 'an end in itself', not a means predicted by quantitative data to lead to a desirable result. 'Normative appeal, not empirical evidence', he says, supports its justification.

Normative and ideological debates

This comes to show that the broader debate on ownership is a democratic and ideological debate. As shown, even some critics of ownership have come to assume post-ideological frameworks that have naturalized neoliberal principles. Circumscribing concepts such as pluralism and diversity (relevant to the discussion) to ideologically-neutral empirical data, rather than to value-laden notions (Karppinen, 2015), should be treated as an expression of a particular neoliberal worldview. Noam (2009:13) argues that the negative aspects of media do not necessarily derive from trends of media concentration, but are product of the same force: profit orientation. Commercial pressures, he says, have led even small and medium-sized media firms to assume irresponsible and profit-driven behaviours. This seems to suggest that media ownership, whether concentrated or diversified, operates within an ideological economic system that favours pure profit maximization, rather than social responsibility and principles along these lines. Even if Noam assumes an impartial approach, his insights are important to analyse in the context of this section: if dynamics of profit growth do not influence big media firms more than small or medium-sized ones, then commercialism, diversity of content and patterns of concentration have to be analysed as ideological processes.

The issue of diversity of content provides an interesting example of the debate on empirical frameworks set against normative ones. Diversity in concentration does not necessarily imply diversity in content (Noam, 2009). If founded on an empirical basis, this datum can be used as an argument in favour of concentration (Entman, 2003). Content diversity, from the perspective of Baker's (2007) democratic distributive value, pales in significance when compared to *source* diversity, as it misses the point about why democracy calls for diversity. To him, 'when people freely agree' (p.15) and reach an egalitarian ideal, democracy does not require viewpoint or content diversity. However, this argument draws on a model of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1996) that requires a coherent and unified consensus irreconcilable with the heterogeneous nature of society, which according to Mouffe (2005) is the cornerstone of democracy.

Baker's invaluable contribution to media ownership research is putting forward a normative response in light of the failure of empirical data to make sense of complex communication environments. To him, the democratic distributive value is a principle that ought to be relevant for any democratic model without the need for complicated empirical research or debatable economic analyses. This argument alone could write off Noam's 400-page complicated empirical research,

but he adopts a sensible middle-ground, providing valuable insights to both ends of the debate.

Concerns in relation to media ownership need to consider alternative understandings of democracy. One of the tenets of liberal democracy is that markets need to be free of structural controls to operate effectively and allow equal representation of all perspectives. This model has made it possible for certain actors to hold enormous, unequal and hence undemocratic power (Baker, 2007), as the previously evoked case of Berlusconi. In Latin America, media concentration is not a frequent topic in the discourse of political and social actors when referring to the necessary conditions of an authentic democracy (Trejo Delarbre, 2015). Guerrero (2015:211) considers the political systems have shaped to a large extent the contours of their media systems: Historic clientelism – understood as the relations between political and media elites– and market deregulation are the defining variables that have naturalized and modelled the Latin American media landscape. Baker's warning about the risks of the abuse of communicative power by media is typified by this region's media systems.

Picard and Dal Zotto (2015) have identified that most small countries usually have two dominant media companies, and larger about four to six, making it a highly concentrated industry by comparison to most others. To contextualize, Mexico, the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world (INEGI, 2015), has two dominant media companies who control 90% of the broadcasting sector (Guerrero, 2015). The case of Mexico displays many of the traits described by media scholars as to the outcomes of acute media concentration in a democracy: it has restricted cultural, political and linguistic diversity (Becerra and Mastrini, 2009); it has reduced the outlets from which citizens can acquire and exchange the information and ideas necessary to navigate the public life (Baker, 2007); it has emphasized the role of the audiences as consumers rather than citizens (Buckingham, 2013), with 72% of their income corresponding to advertisement (Lizárraga Salas and Bravo Torres Coto, 2015). This latter piece of data conveys a more advanced stage of concentration of media ownership than the bulk of advanced industrial democracies studied by scholars from the US and Europe. A clear indicator of this is the audience share of broadcast television: as of 2010, Televisa had 70% of the segment; 63% of Mexican homes do not have cable television (Newsline Report, 2013), making broadcast television the most conspicuous outlet in the media landscape. Furthermore, the complicity between the State and a selection of private corporations has positioned community and indigenous media in an uphill situation where they have struggled for adequate funding, the awarding of licenses and even legal recognition (Guerrero, 2015).

Freedman (2014:176) has analysed the ideological backdrop of media ownership politics, which to him embody 'systems of thought and action that are related to specific ways of ordering the world'. Televisa's extensive dependence on advertising revenue and the concentration of the audience share reveal attitudes and values of the wider ideological position they espouse. The ideological approach of media ownership represents a central element in the broader analytical framework of this research because it allows to explain how, despite the democratic tilt of regulations and policies (Freedman, 2014; Picard and Dal Zotto, 2015), the predominant media model is constituted and reproduced within a specific, economically-driven, viewpoint. How else, if not for these practices, a broadcast television company in the 60's can currently partake in broadcast television, cable television, radio, telecommunication networks, magazines, internet, cinema, and own football teams and stadiums? (Lizárraga Salas and Bravo Torres Coto, 2015) Freedman (2014) and other communication scholars have identified that structures of media ownership such as this one are central to secure consent to 'market-driven politics' (p.177). This implies that the media structure in Mexico has managed to naturalize capitalist relations and systems of thought, revealing their ideological underpinnings.

In such conditions, the basic argument that pluralism of media ownership is an essential element of a healthy democracy feels almost passé. The Mexican media landscape could be seen as an exemplar of the consequences that acute media concentration can have on the health of a democracy. Structures of media ownership are able to naturalize capitalist relations that stimulate concentration (Freedman, 2014). Attempts to promote pluralism and accountability *only* through ownership regulations and policies feel somewhat disingenuous to achieve in such an enfranchised scenario of media ownership concentration (or disenfranchised media pluralism?).

It could be argued that pluralistic media ownership is as crucial, if not more, for a media landscape such as this one; however, what is reasoned here is that the structure that upholds and stimulates the concentration of media is rooted to a point which it has degraded the democratic character conferred to media to a point of obsolescence. Questions of great concerns to media scholars from Europe and the US such as the identity of TV audiences as consumers or citizens seem, if not immaterial, at least secondary in such settings. Media companies have been operating within an economic model that fosters the concentration of ownership (Guerrero, 2015), giving them, in turn, the position to influence deregulatory policies (Freedman, 2014); media ownership is wholly seen as a vehicle for business, rather for both its commercial (for consumers) and formative elements

(for citizens). On paper, media regulatory policies do not entirely enable this structure; as this research will review later, the democratic character made explicit in legislation finds limited resonance in practice.

One has to wonder how issues of democracy and citizenship can come into view in a scenario where the media market configuration and commodified consumer habits have been structured for decades. Despite the possible emergence of new private players in the Mexican market of broadcast television and the legal recognition of community media, as legislated in the telecommunications and broadcasting reform in 2013-14, there is little indication that they will alter the current commodified character of the content in the foreseeable future (Lizárraga Salas and Bravo Torres Coto, 2015). This resonates with the previous discussion on content diversity as elucidated by Baker and Noam. However, Guerrero (2015) has identified a shift of trends in some dimensions: the government, driven by pressures of social sectors and civil society groups, is starting to promote policies in areas such as antitrust regulations and access to new technologies.

In a context of reduced regulatory capacities by the state brought about neoliberal reforms and historical trends of political groups fostering mutually beneficial relationships with media elites, the topic of media ownership concentration and pluralism are topics of great concern to Latin American media scholars, journalists, publics and policy makers that require an expanded conceptual framework that includes dimensions of media and civic education.

Media pluralism

Given the considerable level of concentration of media ownership in Latin American countries, it is pertinent to flesh out current approaches to media pluralism that emerge from different models of democracy. By engaging with democratic theory we can question normative claims made in academic and political debates. This will allow this research to establish how regulations that promote dissemination of ownership within a liberal model of democracy will struggle to discontinue the on-going naturalization of neoliberal worldviews by existing media structures. In this way, we can steer away from ideal-types of regulatory behaviours (Just, 2009) as the panacea to the democratic ailments of Latin American media, to avenues in harmony with the aims of this research that will explore the missing educational link to media and democracy.

Jakubowicz (2015:49) considers that the determining factor in media pluralism policy is, ultimately, of an ideological and political character. The assumption is

that, if not approached from a certain understanding of democracy and pluralism, media policies will do little to reform the media landscape; however, a more holistic approach that incorporates education might have a more realistic chance to enable the formation of citizens capable of navigating critically between their identities as consumers and citizens, gaining the elements to situate the role of the media and themselves in relation to broader social, cultural and political contexts (Mihailidis, 2015).

Talking about pluralism and diversity always requires a frame of reference in which it has political meaning (Karppinen, 2007). Raeijmaekers and Maesele (2015:1042) state that 'media pluralism' has become a sort of buzzword in political, public and even academic discourses, with little operative clearness. In an effort to underpin the meaning and implications of pluralism and diversity, they examine different conceptual and normative beliefs about pluralism against the backdrop of three democratic models (liberal pluralism, deliberative democracy and radical pluralism) and develop a two-dimensional framework that embraces a distinction between pluralism and diversity. By doing so, they lay the theoretical foundation on which to identify why different studies on media pluralism have different expectations and outcomes.

Isolating diversity from pluralism is relevant, as they elicit different approaches to policy-making. According to Karppinen (2013), diversity is descriptive and more empirically-based, reproduced in the broader tendency of policy makers to hinge on what they see as more reliable quantitative methods; pluralism, however, is related to normative judgments, currently marginalized from policy frameworks. This resonates with the previous claims by Lizárraga Salas and Bravo Torres Coto in regards to the emergence of new actors in Mexican broadcast television not necessarily signifying a more plural landscape, but rather one in which there is a more dispersed reproduction of the same content.

According to Karppinen (cited in Jakubowicz, 2015) these three broad traditions of democratic theory offer distinct frameworks for understanding media pluralism. As established previously, media politics in general, and media ownership and the debate on concentration and pluralism in particular, are still largely grounded in liberal values and ideology: individual freedom, dispersion of power, self-government, and the belief that market behaviour represents these values (Jakubowicz, 2015). Following the global trend of the late 1980s, Mexico embodies the liberal model as a result of liberal-ridden market reforms (Guerrero 2015). Within this model, media is supposed to have a representative role committed to monitoring all kinds of information on society as to inform the 'individuals' divergent needs and views' to political elites (Raeijmaekers and

Maesele, 2015:1045). Behind the liberal model lies the assumption that media, in order to ensure its independence from the government's compromising influence, has to be fixed to the free market, with the liberty to operate like commercialized entities regulated through consumer choice (Anand et al., 2007).

As previously discussed, one of the central ideas of deliberative democracy is the attempt to reconcile disagreements through the discursive formation of public opinion. Much in line with has been presented this far on media practices in Mexico, scholars of the deliberative democratic model argue that market-oriented media manage information like a commodity: simplified, customized, and decontextualized— addressing publics as consumers instead of citizens (Habermas, 1989). This of course would demand a more participatory structure over the current professional-commercialized media organization, favouring tools like the internet which are expected to stimulate citizen participation (Mihailidis, 2015).

Much in line with the discussions hitherto, Jakubowicz (2015) points out that ever more, the deliberative model is considered in media studies as an out-dated ideal with decreasing practical relevance in contemporary societies because its 'emphasis on rational deliberation and consensus ignores unequal relations of power, the depth of social pluralism and fundamental value differences' (p.25), thus offering little foundation for democratization. Media scholars such as Mihailidis reveal their adherence to a deliberative model of democracy, positioning the participatory trait of digital media at the centre of their normative educational model of citizenship. Other scholars are not so quick to exalt the plural and emancipatory character of media emanating from the internet (see Hindman, 2008).

The ideological discussions of media ownership staged above by Freedman are in tune with the radical-pluralist model of democracy, which is distrustful about the liberal and deliberative practices of the first two models for their post-ideological basis (Raeijmaekers and Maesele, 2015). According to agonistic scholars such as Mouffe (2013), it is undesirable for democratic politics to reach consensus and overcome ideological struggles and conflict because it requires the sedimentation of dominant power relations and the exclusion of discourses embodied by dissident social groups. Agonistic pluralism offers an alternative to the deliberative democracy utopia of rationalizing society through universal principles, and instead emphasizes views of contestation and disarticulation of hegemonic powers (Karppinen, 2009).

These ideas at first bring to mind Baker's (2007:8) 'complex democracy', which involves a struggle among different groups with their own projects and interests according to their conception of a desirable world. Both models conceive media for their pluralist function. Ultimately, however, Baker's complex democracy asserts liberal ('egalitarian dispersal') and deliberative ('inclusive common discourse' (p.9)) foundations, abandoning any notion of struggle. In an agonistic model, the idea of pluralism conceives the media as sites of struggle, concerned with the discursive contestation of ideological viewpoints. In normative terms, this model holds that society is pronounced by hegemonic ideological assumptions, 'which are either reproduced by or addressed and contested in media representation' (Racijmaekers and Maesele, 2015:1054). However, according to Karppinen (2009), few theories, institutional or concrete political questions have been formulated about the consequences for these debates and discursive struggles in the media and the public sphere.

The appeal of radical pluralism as evaluative ideal to gauge contemporary liberal media systems such as the one in Mexico is that it contests the *status quo* in terms of existing exclusions and inequalities. The media market in Mexico can be construed as the naturalization of power relations in which struggles of an ideological nature have been concealed behind the singular and unified depiction of the dominant media that is more reconcilable with liberal democracy. As such, the framework that underlies the existing model seeks to overcome and neutralize ideological conflict. Nonetheless –making use of agonistic lexicon– the hegemonic media concentration that came as a result of discursive sedimentation is often contested by antagonistic groups formed by smaller media outlets, community media, academics, journalists, and advocacy groups.

Considering its post-colonial history, the Mexican social reality has been characterized by diversity and unequal power relations, with a limited amount of arenas for struggle and contestation. As such, the ideals of deliberative democracy ignore the depth of this social heterogeneity by being too reliant on the view that social order must be established on the ideals of unanimity and consensus. It would seem that, given the socio-political order of Mexico, agonistic pluralism offers a democratic model more in tune with the need to situate and evaluate media in broader social, political and cultural debates, concerning issues of power and inequality. Even the ideals of the European public sphere are being challenged and deemed unsuitable to represent the increasingly diverse and plural social reality of the region (Karppinen, 2009). Picard and Del Zotto (2015) state that the fundamental failure of ownership regulation to address pluralism is that ownership is not the real problem, but a proxy for other issues. In light of this

discussion, it is possible to assess the previous discussion about the media's role in regard to the naturalization of neoliberal, market-driven ideologies, and envision a departure with a radical-pluralist orientation. This dissertation assumes a similar position in regards to media and democracy in Mexico. As such, one can examine why media policies that enshrine democratic ideals represent a problematic basis to adequately deal with issues regarding democracy and media.

Media policy: empirical evidence and public participation

It has been unavoidable to raise theoretical and political concerns regarding policy-making in previous discussions on media ownership. This section will take a closer look at current debates on media policy, particularly the underlying factors and implications of recent trends that have seen a shift from normative and political questions to more measurable, empirical definitions of the media environment.

According to Freedman (2015:96), high-profile participants often claim that media policymaking is an impartial and depoliticized area of activity. In this *official* account of the media policy process, policies themselves are framed by experts and developed in formal spaces, written in cryptic parliamentary language and applied disinterestedly, expected to attain measurable results. This account of media policy process has been challenged by theorists on the basis that communicative power in contemporary decision-making situations is not adequately distributed (McChesney, 2003; Baker, 2007). This line of reasoning endorses earlier discussions about dominant media structures with the capacity to secure political consent. However, this understanding of media policymaking is hardly exclusive to European contexts. In Latin American, the previously outlined phenomenon of clientelism reveals that media policy (or politics) has been an area dominated by special interests, in which money and influence are pivotal (Freedman, 2015; Guerrero, 2015).

Media policy is hardly a clean, depoliticized evidence-based process. In 2012, *The Guardian* had access to documents that linked the current president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, to Televisa by the way of several deals dating back to 2005, still as governor, to promote his image at a national level in preparation for the presidential run (González Amador, 2012). The agreements included a dirty campaign against Lopez Obrador, his biggest contender and representative of the left party. This exemplifies how the media system in Mexico is a matter of politics, which cannot be separated from ideological inclinations and self-interest. To

a considerable degree, Freedman's (2015:98) claim that media policy 'is messy and dirty' is an indicator of a bigger political and cultural framework. This is the reason why media policymaking has to be conceived as a sphere of activity that is not detached from social practices. The thesis argues that policies of any kind are culturally specific, dependent upon the particular political and economic arrangements prevailing in a specific context. Media, despite being a vital institution of the public sphere, as Baker calls it, do not exist in a political and economic vacuum.

These concerns are marked by current debates on media policymaking. According to Karppinen (2015:289) there is a growing demand for 'objective, empirical data and performance metrics in public policy-making', seen as a safety measure against vested political interests and an instrument to take more objective decisions. Baker (2007:77) has argued that the empirical approach to media issues 'represents a misguided but increasingly common empiricist belief that quantifiable facts can give answers to normative questions – and can do so without any coherent explanation for how the quantified facts even relate to the normative questions'. In correspondence to earlier discussions, the successful adoption of pluralism and diversity in policymaking, as oppose to value-laden notions such as media freedom and quality, is due to their seeming measurability and apparent ideological neutrality (Hay, 2004).

If we subscribe to Freedman's idea that policymaking is a messy process, the aims to ensure a more objective and evidentiary basis for media policy debates to bypass political disputes are misleading. As stated by Karppinen (2015:288), empirical indicators are hardly neutral. Any empirical definition will involve choices about which criteria are considered valid. These kinds of arguments that reject the policy process as scientific and hygienic seem to be broadly grounded in the so-called science wars debates, where notions of objectivity and neutrality regarding scientific knowledge are challenged, claiming that scientific practices in the production of knowledge share the idiosyncrasies and political nature of other human practices. As such, the selection of empirical indicators and criteria leads to the question as to what political and ideological ideas they rest on. These aspects of policymaking can be enclosed in what Freedman (2015:99) calls 'media policy silences': in broad terms, the gaps in process and unspoken assumptions. These analyses are not entirely posed against the use of empirical evidence in policy making. The big argument here is that empirically-driven data 'should also be seen as political' (Karppinen, 2015:288).

Reducing the complexities of media values to mechanical, 'objective' indicators, more comfortably shaped after economic or administrative angles, can ignore

alternative, social or cultural perspectives, such as the dissent of concerned citizens (Freedman, 2008:99). One example of this is the recently proposed classification criterion which will affect young audiences in Mexico (Ávila, 2015). The classification will allow content targeted to adults previously aired at 8:00pm to be transmitted at 4:00pm, in which, for instance, occasional alcohol and cigarette consumption can be shown. According to Andrés Chao Ebergengy, head of Media Normativity, for the development of these guidelines they consulted Tv Azteca, Televisa, the National Chamber of the Radio and Television Industry (CIRT) and the organization *A favor de lo mejor* (In favor of what is best), financed by major advertisers in the country, including the food industry, supermarket chains, breweries and banks. The process is evidently underpinned by a business scheme that excludes public participation. Private actors, rather than public, have defined the policy. The only non-income-driven participant involved in the process, the association *A favor de lo mejor*, later released a statement on their website expressing disagreement with the proposed guidelines.

This is an exemplary case of ‘media policy fetishism’ (Freedman, 2015:103). The two main analytical dimensions relevant to this case are: the alienation of public participation from decision-making processes, and the previously eluded fixation with evidence and metrics. A situation in which the two dominant media companies and array of major commodity-oriented businesses are involved in the decision-making process of policies concerning such a vulnerable section of the audience not only demands a deep examination of the regulatory organs, but also of the kind of environment that leaves the door open to private rather than public participants in the policy process. This paper argues that the hegemonic framework underlying media policies needs to be brought into the open and scrutinized. For such a thing to happen, there is a need to look beyond the naturalized horizon of institutional policies and regulations, and envisage ways for citizens to be able to influence the media environment. Hesmondhalgh (2001), a critic of marketised social relations, questions whether ownership is a sufficiently extensive frame with which to make sense of complex media environments. The argument is that education would allow audiences and the general public to acquire the literacy to help them navigate the complexities of their democracy in crucial matters such as media policy-making and accountability. The alienating distances derived from policy fetishism could be reduced if the public gained the media literacy to pose questions such as: How can we as citizens gain decision-making power? Where are the access points to participate in the policy process? How can we fight adult advertising at the 4pm slot?

Noam (2009:12) offers an observation to consider: since media systems are held partly responsible either as contributing or causing many of society's problems, too much is expected from a reform of media. He is speaking within the framework of media ownership reform; however, his argument can be re-examined from a different angle: media reform as social reform could not only be unpackaged from ownership policies, but also from education-oriented ones. The educational element of policy initiatives has been taken up recently by some scholars dedicated to explore pluralism of ownership. Even if media literacy is not explicitly articulated, Jakubowicz (2015:47) proposes a public policy agenda to help safeguard social and citizenship objectives in which 'a reconceptualization of *media education*' is required as a way to promote media and social pluralism.

These sorts of claims are of significant value to this research since they come to show that there is a recent trend in media pluralism studies that is starting to incorporate, or at least explore, the dimension of education. This project wants to take this exploration further and bring literacy to the forefront –on par with regulation– of media policymaking. It is not to say that fundamental concepts to media ownership scholars such as of pluralism and diversity need to be abandoned; on the contrary: these concepts are fundamental to a critical-pluralist model of democracy. Rather, what is proposed is to turn the arrangement on its head: in order for it to be relevant to –and participate in– political and ideological debates, a media literacy education model has to be built upon normative values that embrace pluralism and diversity, but also media freedom, accountability, contestation in public spaces, etc.; notions which are notably missing from empirically-driven policies.

Conceiving education as an alternative to regulation should not be the standard; ideally education and regulation should articulate each other. However, as it has been stressed before, to make the dimension of democracy a categorical aspect of the media environment in Mexico, there is a need to blow the lid off and problematize the liberal political and ideological basis in which media policies are rooted. The relationship between democracy and media is therefore a matter of both institutional regulation and a civic media literacy. Silverstone (2007:165-170) offers an insightful metaphor on this subject when he says that regulation is like grammar: 'it addresses the rules of language, not how the language is spoken or what is said'. Along the line of what has been previously argued, he calls for a shift away from narrowly conceived forms of media regulation, towards the possibility of developing a project informed by media literacy as a civic activity, one that recognizes the characteristics and needs of the mediate world.

The project thus far has precisely focused on fleshing out the characteristics and needs that call for a particular model of media literacy based on a radical-pluralist approach to democracy in Mexico. The next section will elaborate on the different debates and approaches regarding media literacy, as the characteristics, settings, and forms that help to conceptualize this concept. This will allow us go into more detail about the particular position that this paper has taken so far.

The construct of media literacy

Among the predominant disciplines that have studied the pedagogical dimension of media we can count critical studies, critical reception, media education and active reception. Since the seventies the diverse perspectives studied in Latin America found in 'educommunication' a hospitable field of study that addresses the relationship between education and communication. Moreover, there were attempts between Latin American researchers and their Anglo-Saxon counterparts to bridge their research fields with underwhelming results given the lack of reciprocal translation, as exemplified by world congress in Toronto in the 90's. However, with the recent mediation of a cultural giant such as UNESCO, media education agendas around the world have come together under the term 'media literacy'.

Media literacy is a relatively new concept but there is a lot available on the matter. As with any topic that has been written about a lot, it can mean two things: that the subject is important to a lot of people, and that this wealth of ideas creates a challenge to organize it and an even bigger challenge to reach a consensus. There are two dimensions for analysing the definition of media literacy: literacy, and how it is conceptualized, and the idea of media to which literacy is linked. Potter (2004:29) wonders whether the first dimension should be conceptualized as a 'skill', 'an accumulation of knowledge', or 'a perspective of the world'. Buckingham (2007:148) argues that the analogy of 'literacy' as the acquisition of competences, knowledge or skills is more difficult to make in other languages, 'where the equivalent term is more overly tied to the notion of writing'. He gives the example of the French word *alphabétisation*, analogous to Spanish's *alfabetización*. It may be partly for this reason that, unlike in the Anglo-Saxon world, in Latin America 'media literacy' (*alfabetización mediática*) was established as the unifying term which refers to the outcome of media education or the everyday encounters with the media until very recently.

Defining the second dimension –media– is important to this project because some scholars emphasize certain media over others. The need for digital skills and competencies are increasingly needed for sailing across media and information-rich societies (Hobbs, 2010). As set forth, however, television in Mexico still stands on the most visible platform in the media arena. This does not mean that the media literacy model explored in this research should just contemplate television. Rather, it implies that the understanding of the *media* attached to *literacy* has to comprise different kinds of media (Adams and Hamm, 2001). Following the increasing trend of situating digital media at the core of media literacy models (see Mihailidis, 2015; Hobbs, 2010) would misrepresent this particular media ecology, and possibly add to the existing social, economic and technological divides in Mexico, constraining, rather than multiplying, the channels of communication.

Media literacy is a complex phenomenon that can be conceptualized as a number of literacies. Potter (2004:31-32) states that, despite the many types of definitions and elements, they are ‘more complementary than they are competitive’. The differences in definition are contingent to what is most important to the writer, an aspect much in line with this research’s aim to develop an understanding of media literacy contextualized in Mexico. However broad and relative, Potter (2004: 32-33) identifies recurring ideas across these definitions: A) Media literacy is not limited to one medium, B) media literacy requires skills, C) media literacy requires certain types of knowledge and D) media literacy must deal with values.

This last idea is inserted in a particularly relevant debate that links to discussions explored in previous sections. Masterman (in Potter, 2004, pp.33-34) argues that media education does not pursue ‘to impose cultural values’ or ideas on what constitutes good or bad content. The problem with this position is not only that in itself is value-laden, as Potter notes, but its deliberately decontextualized character. Of course, no subject in the curricula of schools should seek to “impose” any form of knowledge. However, even if the ultimate goal of learning in schools is to develop critical, independent thinking, the project argues that, just as any language needs a grammatical structure, acquiring skills and knowledge related to the media requires a certain conceptual and ethical framework. Otherwise, such an approach to media literacy education would assume that the media exist in a vacuum.

Many scholars have protested that, given the amount of ideas, it is hard to make sense of the construct of media literacy. As such, many of them have periodically joined efforts to craft consent, as it happened in 1992 with the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy in the US (Aufderheide and Firestone,

1993). This research agrees with Potter's (2004:35) argument that general definitions 'can provide a sense of the perimeters of concern by showing what ideas are included under a term', but are of little use to people interested in carrying out concrete strategies or plans. Nonetheless, Buckingham (2007:149) argues that any definition of literacy is 'necessarily ideological', meaning that literacy is inevitably a contested field. Along this line, the position this project assumes is that no single, absolute consented definition of media literacy is desirable. In consonance with the discussions staged earlier, overcoming disagreements and reaching consensus would render a post-ideological understanding of media literacy, ignoring the pluralistic media environments across societies, with their particular needs and conditions.

Media literacy: citizenship, ownership and the digital liberator

Buckingham (2000:220-222) has been one of the most vocal advocates in recent times for the case of media education as a site to define future opportunities for citizenship. Taking as a basis a tradition of political education or 'political literacy', he distinguishes between two models: the liberal, premised on a division between the political and the personal domains, and the participatory perspective, which challenges this distinction and implies a more egalitarian interplay among a range of social fields. He argues that, aiming to avoid political controversy, schools consider that children are unable of making complex political judgements and leave the business of political education to sources such as the media. From this perspective, he considers that the curriculum should assist young people to become actively involved in their surrounding media culture, encouraging their critical participation as cultural producers.

Some scholars find in new media a venue to practice this form of participatory citizenship. Mihailidis (2015) places digital media at the centre of a new culture of citizen participation, making a case as to why (digital) media literacy must be incorporated to educational systems. His work rides on the premise that the internet offers new public spheres, dissolving the centralized control of information and political discourse. Mihailidis understands that sophisticated forms of cultural and political expression are not a guaranteed consequence of technological innovation, and rather than recurring to cultural policies 'to foster and support them', as Buckingham (2000:222) suggests should be the case, he forwards an educational perspective. Buckingham is openly suspicious about this form of technological determinism, and considers that such accounts tend to underestimate more traditional forms of communication and political activity.

Furthermore, Hidman (2008) offers a comprehensive research, which challenges the notion of the internet as the quintessential democratic technology that has come to redistribute political influence and involve citizens in previously untapped political activities. Indeed, his research finds that internet traffic is dominated by a few media companies, producing new forms of monopoly that recall the processes of ownership concentration of traditional media systems.

In order to bring these discussions into the context of Mexico, it is important to assume the more sceptical position of Buckingham. Not only because of the wager that adopting a technological triumphalist outlook supposes, but for a factor considered by Hindman (2008:9) in his case against digital democracy that feels patently relevant to the divisive social reality of Mexico: the digital divide. Recent figures show that 44.4% of the population has access to internet (INEGI, 2014), a remarkable statistic that is not easy to dismiss. However, even if the gaps are narrowing, it is equally hard to disdain the potential correlation between this datum and the reported figure of 46.2% of the population living under the poverty line (CNN México, 2015). We need to consider this evidence in light of the inequalities inherent to the social structures of a country that has historically gone through a process of decolonization and, in recent times, the culmination of a democratic transition with the political party PRI losing the presidential elections in 2000 after seventy-two years in office. Differences in the digital divide brought up by Hindman such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, and education have to be valued in this context.

The topic of the digital divide was placed in the agenda of the telecommunications and broadcasting reform of 2013-14 and several initiatives were launched aimed at promoting the universal adoption of information and communications technology (ICTs), in accordance to the constitutional right established in Article 6. In this setting, the government project *México Conectado* (Mexico Connected) sets out to 'usher Mexico into the information and knowledge society' (ITU, 2015:6) by 2018 as defined by five objectives. One of these goals seeks out to incorporate digital technologies into the educational process with aims to develop digital skills in students. The fifth objective, in tone with Mihailidis' views, states that the program is developing mechanisms that will support society 'resolve issues of public interest by promoting citizen participation in public policy development'. The goal is remarkable in itself, but no further information is offered as to how citizens will be able to take part in policy processes. If accomplished, this would establish a framework that directly engages with the alienating process of policymaking, as identified by Freedman. These mechanisms

of citizen participation are as intriguing as absent in this document and the official website, but this concept will be revisited in a forthcoming chapter.

Even though the nationwide program has clear objectives that incorporate dimensions of education and citizenship to face the digital divide, the link between the two is not explicit, each representing separate objectives. It could be argued as well that the educational objective only incorporates *functional* aspects of media literacy; digital or otherwise: it describes the acquisition of mechanical skills, but not the critical understanding or knowledge of the media and political culture that surrounds the students. If one of the objectives seeks the involvement of public participation in policy process, it follows that the educational goal should be thematically consistent in its civic character. This form of institutional civic engagement needs the public to understand and learn about the channels and processes to be able to participate. If anything, the existence of wide-ranging projects underpinned by questionable normativity such as *México Conectado* make the case for media literacy in the curriculum of schools with a direct link to issues of citizenship and democracy even stronger.

Furthermore, Buckingham (2000:222) reminds us that if rights of access to cultural expression are to be fulfilled, more traditional forms of civil and political rights must in the balance. As elucidated earlier, the prominence of television, the digital and socioeconomic divides, the alienating character of policymaking, and the liberal market-oriented ideology of the media system, calls for a more holistic, political and multifaceted form of media literacy education suitable to engage with issues and struggles inherent to a heterogeneous and complex media environment in Mexico.

Moreover, we cannot ignore that the advent of the internet has been opportunistically embraced by advocates of deregulatory policies of media ownership on the basis that free markets and technology will take care of media concentration (Noam, 2009:19). The claim is that the internet has taken audiences and advertising away from traditional media, making these sponsors question if 'ownership rules are even relevant in today's media market' (Freedman, 2014:178). The argument goes that, in a media environment of digital advances and consumer choice, worrying about oligopoly or lack of diversity is beside the point. Doyle (2015:303) considers that it is debatable whether the proliferation of accesses to information has contributed positively to diversity and pluralism. As Hindman, she explains that search engines tend to direct audiences towards highly popular content, which poses a threat to diversity (p.304). Ultimately, there is a need to assess whether projects such as *México Conectado* operate on the assumption that the internet has done away with the need for ownership

regulations. To illustrate, the terms ‘innovative’, ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘productivity’, ‘businesses’, ‘economy’ ‘services’, ‘products’, are inscribed in the headlining goals.

Envisaging a critical-pluralist approach

Instead of *assuming* that media literacy is inherently a good thing, this project has set the groundwork through debates on concepts such as ownership, pluralism and democracy to delineate the significance of being media literate in many of today’s societies, with particular focus on the Mexican ones. Potter (2004:34) claims that the common purpose of media literacy is focused on improving individuals in one way or another, with the underlying assumption that ‘society at large will experience benefits’. Potter stresses notions of what being media literate is in terms such as meaning-making, the risks of harmful effects, dangers of exposure.

Taking into account these ideas should be vital to any media literacy educative model, but this research discerns that this approach encloses the outcomes of media literacy within a protectionist shell, limiting the democratic potential of media literacy as a whole. This brings the project to a key dispute in media literacy education, as identified by Buckingham (2005): the effects debate. He differentiates between teaching media effects to *protect* students from making students *aware*. To him, media education should be about engaging students with media, rather than protecting them. Enclosing media education within the effects debate presupposes a powerless audience facing an all-powerful media. As said before, even if teaching about media’s effects is important in media literacy education, this framework avoids many of the complexities involved in the political and ideological context and role of media.

Very illuminating to this thesis’s position, Buckingham (2005:19) elaborates this idea by saying that ‘..we can only understand the role of the media in the context of other social, historical and cultural forces, and that seeing this in terms of simple notions of ‘cause and effect’ often leads us to ignore the complexity of what are concerned about’. To a point, this project agrees with Mihailidis (2015:37) that positioning media literacy as a protectionist field will not deliver a holistic approach that teaches about, and engages with, society, democracy and culture. The point of departure is when he situates ‘digital culture’ at the core of media literacy education.

The idea is not to regress the field of media literacy to pre-internet and social media times, but to recognize the need for a dynamic definition of the concept,

etched with values and seeking outcomes that are open to debate. Of course, all of this presupposes a democratic center, and yet even the foundations of what democracy means are not undisputable. Kellner and Share (2005:371) have already noted that media literacy education, as a way to avoid prohibition and gain appeal for K-12 educators, lost sight on establishing outcomes that were tied to any political ideology.

From this understanding, media literacy should not turn away from political and ideological notions. This in itself, as seen above, is not a new idea, but usually the bulk of scholars that engage with the civic dimensions of media literacy do not shed light on the democracy model they are committed to. If we bring to the fore previous discussions held in this paper, even if literacy is necessarily an ideologically definition, it means that there are normative post-ideological frameworks underlying certain approaches to media literacy, in particular competency-based ones. The core of this project has embraced an alternative understanding of democracy with emphasis on contestation: an agonistic-pluralist approach to democracy. In this sense, a critical-pluralist media literate publics would not only take part in debates regarding the naturalization of uneven power relations between the media and the public, but also lead them to conceive the role of the media as a provider of ‘agonistic public spaces in which there is the possibility for dissensus to be expressed or different alternatives to be put forward’ (Mouffe in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 974). A critical-pluralist approach to media literacy, for instance, can engage with issues of concentration of ownership in media industries and the lack of source and content diversity (Baker, 2007; Potter, 2004) as well as discussing representations of class, gender and race (Kellner and Share, 2005:375).

Researching a critical-pluralist approach to media literacy

In order to assess the political landscape in which the media system in Mexico is founded upon, this research used the testimonies of ten respondents who represent experts in the field of media literacy. It is considered that by analyzing the various accounts given by the experts, this research can contribute in forming a clearer picture that is sensitive to the complex landscape of the Mexican media system.

Given that the main research questions inquire about the *how* behind unquantifiable issues such as principles, values and democratic standards, a qualitative approach to data collection was employed. More specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted regarding the topics of media and democracy and media literacy. However, there are certain issues as to how the researcher is able to develop explanations about the object of the study. This method ensues from a specific methodology, which in turn entails particular ontological, epistemological assumptions. Indeed, one important discussion found in this research relates to the use of empirical evidence and normative assumptions in policymaking. The critique that scholars of media pluralism aim at the use of empirical evidence in policymaking is expressed through the questioning of their supposed objectivity and neutrality. This is very much in line with the debate found at the heart of the so-called 'science wars' (Hacking, 1999), denoting the divide between qualitative and quantitative research accompanied with their respective ontological assumptions and methodologies.

By utilizing respondents who are labelled as 'experts', this research accepts that knowledge and representations of the world are expressed by adopting a certain position within this world, but that there is a need to take notions of power and practice into account. This portends that knowledge is constituted under conditions of power and can refer to real objects. With this in mind, the critical realist approach allows this project to conflate the empirical with the constituted. The social character of knowledge does not mean that it cannot effectively make sense of real objects, which exist independently of the researcher (Sayer, 2000). This research studies objects that are socially constructed and concept-dependent, such as publics, institutions, democracy and literacy. However, these are objects, which often operate with substantial independence from the constructions, which observers have of them (p.91). Even discourse theorists are not denying the existence of the material, but rather the discursive is regarded as a needed component to ascribe meaning to the material (see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Critical theory requires going behind the observables by looking into the mechanisms behind a phenomenon (Jackson, 2011; Sayer 2000). By embracing this approach, this project - in dealing with the link between literacy and participation, the correspondence between knowledge and things - tries to answer the research questions that are situated in the conjuncture between the discursive and the practical, between media education and democracy.

The process of interviewing expert media observers

In order to have a deeper grasp of the relationship between democracy and the media, the analysis chapter will use first-hand testimonies from participants and observers of these policy processes and real world events in Mexico. Such approach is particularly crucial when dealing with broad and divisive issues such as the democratization of media in a convoluted context like Mexico. In this way, the interviews also help the research supplement and/or challenge ‘official accounts with first-hand testimony’ (Tansey, 2007:7). Another relevant aspect is that interviewing experts on these matters leaves the door open to theoretically-guided questions about issues that are specific to the objectives and aim of this project, thus establishing explanations that lay behind the scenario. By interviewing participants situated in different nodal points of the media system, this research has collected data about processes, events and concepts of the Mexican media system that will shed light and advance the discussions explored in the literature review.

Semi-structured interviews is a useful form of data collection when the study has a clear objective and focus, as it does not limit the acquisition of information to pre-determined categories imposed by the researcher as structured interviews do. According to Bryman (2008), in this method there is a marked interest in the interviewees’ point of view, and the non-structured approach encourages respondents to go off at tangents to give insights into what they consider relevant and important (p.437), which is consistent with this research’s decision of relying on the perspective of experts. This method tends to be flexible, and may allow the interviewer to depart from the guides or questionnaires used, leading to open-ended questions and follow up questions. The aim is to get rich and detailed answers (Bryman, 2008:437), which may bring forth themes that the interviewer had not previously considered, benefiting from the respondents’ ‘elite’ status and allowing them to fully flesh out their expertise.

The ten interviews were conducted from December 2015 to April 2016. The two pilot interviews happened face-to-face in Mexico. The rest of the interviews were carried out via Skype and had an average duration of one hour. Carrying out interviews via Skype or telephone conveys certain considerations. The interviews were audio-based; there was no reliance on video. The interviews were restricted to these media for economic, practical and institutional restraints. One disadvantage with telephone interviews is that it is not possible to observe body language, but an advantage is that it is more effective to ask sensitive questions (Bryman, 2008). The interviews were conducted in Spanish and then translated

into English. All of the participants gave their consent to use their names and the content of the interviews in full disclosure. Nine out of ten agreed to receive a transcript of the interview. It was not established that they would receive a report of the finalized project.

The interview guides emerged from the research questions, but did not incorporate the questions themselves. Instead, the interview questions derived from the themes of the research questions, bounded to events, processes and even concepts within the context of Mexico and the objects of study. In this way, there was a subset of open-ended questions and themes designed accordingly to the area of expertise of the respondent, which gave way to follow up questions that were not previously considered, were formulated differently or had a different place in the overall sequence of the questionnaire. There were two pilot interviews, after which the themes of the questions were tightened up according to the research aim. Each interview subsequently influenced the questions of the next one. For example, after the pilot interview with Jose Carlos Moreno, digital media featured as a recurrent topic in the succeeding interviews and became a prominent theme throughout the overall research. In a similar way, Aleida Calleja's interview, rich in matters of citizen participation, shaped the following interviews (See Appendix C for an overall interview guide).

Analysis of media policies

This research analysed policy documents in order to complement the data collected from the interviews. In particular, an official document of *México Conectado*, a project ensuing from the constitutional reform, which guarantees universal access to internet through a public network installed across the territory. The analysis of this document was carried out through concepts and debates regarding the ideological nature of media policymaking in liberal democracies. Furthermore, there was an analysis of certain sections of the Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting, specifically the ones regarding the new media regulator, media education, audience rights and community and indigenous media. Here the data collected from the interviews became crucial, and certain questions were designed according to these sections in order to be able to triangulate the literature, the policy documents and the data gathered from the interviews. The goal was to probe beyond the democratic intonation often found in these documents in order to examine their ideological footings, and see if these courses of action really open the door to a less concentrated, more plural media landscape. A finding of this policy analysis, for example, is the problematic use of

both 'information society' and 'knowledge society' in policy documents, a debate that will be examined in the analysis chapter.

Sampling

According to Tansey (2007), sampling for elite interviews presupposes different approaches that should be in line with the aim of the research. Tansey argues that deciding an approach will be a function of the research questions, but a combination approaches is an optimal method. The research did not carry out the sampling with the aim of producing generalizations about the characteristics, beliefs or actions that can be applied to the entire population, but rather the criteria was based on obtaining information and insights about events, processes and concepts (p.15) drawn from relevant actors to these matters.

However, sampling considerations were not only dependent on methodological issues, but also on practical ones. During the sampling process some limitations emerged from the beginning, in particular in regards to the availability of their contact information or their limited agendas. Nevertheless, once the participants agreed to an interview and dates were set, there were no issues of time restraint on their part, and the duration of the interviews were determined by methodological rather than practical considerations.

Even though the sampling was focused on obtaining the testimony of visible actors in their fields, the aim of this research is to assess the media system in Mexico as a whole, which necessarily comprises a sizeable sample despite their elite status. In this sense, the research adopted a 'purposive sampling' approach, which is a 'selection method where the purpose of the study and the researcher's knowledge of the population guide the process' (Tansey, 2007:17). The initial idea was to identify a particular set of respondents deemed most appropriate for the research needs; however, it became clear that an approach based upon the idea that the researcher has sufficient knowledge to identify from the start the type of actors needed can be limiting. The notion came to be when the respondents themselves started to bring up names that they considered key actors.

The approach was then recalibrated, and the initial set of respondents were then asked to initiate a chain-referral process by providing names of people they felt were influential and relevant in the fields of media and democracy and media literacy. This approach is known as 'snowball/chain-referential sampling' (Tansey, 2007). This process was continual until the sampling met the criteria for the scope of the project, which had to consider the limitations that a relatively new topic

such as media literacy represents in Mexico. Even if it bears no relation to the method's approach, the sample is comprised by five women and five men (refer to Appendix A to learn more about the respondents). Seven of the respondents reside in Mexico City, the capital, one in the state of Jalisco and two in the state of Morelos. The political and economic power of Mexico is centralized in the capital, which represents an important hub for institutional and civic matters. In this sense, the sampling was carried out prioritizing the relevance of their positions as experts in their fields, rather than basing it on gender or regional considerations. The selection was distributed according to the main themes of this research, given that it examines different angles constituting the media system in Mexico. Some of the interviewees were particularly knowledgeable about public participation, the democratization of media, concentration and pluralism, or media literacy in Latin America.

Nine out of ten interviews were conducted in a single session. The first face-to-face pilot interview with Velasco required a follow-up, which took place in her personal property. A good rapport was built in the different interviews. For example, Moreno and Padilla offered the opportunity for journalistic collaborations in their publications; Aleida Calleja requested a radio interview on her show on the topic of public service media in Sweden; Gómez-Mont offered ideas for future research projects and contact information of relevant actors; Orozco showed an active interest in the research and recognized it could be a valuable contribution to the media literacy efforts in Mexico, offering advice on how to proceed and encouraging future contact with him.

Data analysis: coding and theory

The interviews were transcribed based on verbal responses; no contextual or non-verbal markers were registered. The interviews were then coded using a combination of first and second cycle coding methods, as suggested by Saldaña (2009). These were 'descriptive coding', which summarizes the main topic of the excerpt (p.3), and 'theoretical coding', the moment where the categories and subcategories are connected with the central categories (p.163). The desired result was to find emerging patterns in the codes to organize them in over-arching themes in line with the research questions and the content addressed in the literature review. This process was both creative and analytical (p.30).

There were two general cycles of coding as to the descriptive and theoretical segments. On the first cycle, after the interviews had been transcribed a code was

attached to certain words or parts of the answers, which only described the content of that excerpt. After the process was finalised with all the transcripts, the coded extracts were organized into themes and subthemes confined to each individual interview. The themes emerged from the more relevant concepts and topics of the literature review, and the subthemes looked to offer a more nuanced differentiation. This first-cycle file contained an overall of twenty themes and close to seventy subthemes, producing a total of twenty pages. The second-cycle theoretical set out to organize the vast amount of themes and subthemes into broader categories. This required a level of abstraction, which took the descriptive into the theoretical. The categorization was no longer delimited by each individual interview, but was rather separated into two different matrixes. The subject of the first matrix was 'media and democracy', structured into eleven categories, such as 'ownership' and 'public participation'. The second subject was 'media education' and was organized into a system of twelve classifications, including 'absence and opportunities' and 'civic democracy'. These two matrixes together made a total of twenty-four pages (refer to Appendix D for examples of the coding). With the themes fully fleshed-out, the data will be put together with policy, economic and political analyses in the next chapter in order to bring to the surface the intricate elements that dwell in the depths of the media system in Mexico.

Reflections and considerations

There are aspects of the research process that are important to acknowledge and reflect upon.

Bryman (2008) says that it is well established that the concepts of reliability and validity need to be adapted in qualitative research. According to him, within these definitions is rooted the concept of repeatability of measurements and the existence of an objective value. According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982) reliability, or the degree to which a study can be reproduced in a different context, is a difficult standard to meet in qualitative research because it is not possible to 'freeze' a social setting and its circumstances.

Tansey (2007:9) highlights that the reliability of the interviewee's statements can be conditioned if their involvement in the events or processes is important, as with politicians who 'may attempt to slant their accounts'. Recognizing this restriction, the interviews were carried out with people who are familiar to the events and processes but do not have direct influence in policymaking. Rather they emerge from the civil society as observers, analysts, scholars, activists, public figures,

and/or policy advisors. As discussed previously and in a forthcoming chapter, their position as policy advisors does not necessarily translate into actual influence on the policy outcome. As such, the reliability of the statements is not dependent on the respondents' need to inflate or minimize their own role in the events or processes in view that there was no 'political capital to be gained or lost from association with the issues in question' (Tansey, 2007, pp.9-10).

To guarantee the reliability of the responses, the research consulted multiple sources for all significant data points, as advised by Davies (2001). However, as most research that relies on interviews, this project could have always benefited from conducting more interviews to guarantee and exhaust all possible perspectives. Rudestam and Newton (2007) say that real saturation never occurs because each new respondent has something new to contribute, but that the saturation point happens when the researcher feels he or she has collected sufficient data to represent the scope and depth of the phenomenon, which happened in this case with valuable data that was omitted as a consequence of space limitations.

Furthermore, the position of the researcher within the research has to be considered. This presumes that the respondents held a position of power during the interview. In this sense the interviews were performative, in which the identities of the respondents as experts were constructed and performed through their answers. In order to assure validity, by which one can harmonize the observations of the researcher and the answers offered by the respondents, their statements must be given the status of both discourse and action, through which they express a position of power. To interpret what the respondents mean there is a need to relate their discourse to its referents and contexts (Sayer, 2000:20). This means that social reality is only partially textual or discursive. There is, however, the need to recognize that since this method is used to study social reality—which is an open system (Jackson, 2011)—it means that there is a first level of interpretation or hermeneutic level by the respondents, and a second level of interpretation by the researcher when relating their responses to their context (Sayer, 2000), so validity is never fully realized (Bryman, 2008).

Media literacy in a changing media landscape

This project has offered a panoramic view of the media and political environment in Mexico in order to understand why media literacy is central as both a subject of study and a potential contributor to democratic issues. As such, the starting point has been that media systems do not exist in a vacuum, and are shaped to a large extent by the political systems. Political systems are complex entities, articulated by an inestimable number of institutions, agents, structures, discourses, values, practices, etc.; it has been stressed that Mexico is a liberal democracy with a neoliberal economic model. The contours of the media system are fashioned after conditions of privatization and deregulation. On these grounds, the analytical variables have been selected to make possible a critique: if the aim of the project is to support the need of media literacy, it follows that it has to be positioned critically facing said conditions. Jose Carlos Moreno (2015), founder of the activist news portal *Morelos 3.0* and former human rights coordinator of the student movement *#YoSoy132* considers that ‘Mexico experiences a simulation of a very intricate democracy, with many actors and participants’. The aim of this project has not simply been to bridge the gap between media literacy and the exercise of citizenship, but constituting it as a single unit that shares a dual core: education and democracy.

The project has gathered data to progress, challenge or verify these ideas by carrying out elite interviews with academics, policy advisors, media observers and public servants at the forefront of media and democracy and media literacy in Mexico. Using the data provided by the interviews, the analysis is carried out within a macro-meso-level frame, looking at the bigger picture in order to understand the conditions that media literacy education has to face. Some of the guiding themes are the democratic transition, media public policy, citizen participation, the relationship between media and political elites, and the tension between functional and critical approaches to media literacy.

The ‘perverse relationship’

Concentration was a recurrent theme in the interviews, often considered a defining characteristic of Mexico’s media system and a cause of concern for advocates of democratic media: ‘when the media are concentrated, and especially when they are highly concentrated in a few hands, as has been the case of Mexico, it happens that media, on the one hand, acquire excessive power, preventing other

sectors of society to exercise a counterbalance’, reflects Raúl Trejo Delarbre (2016) who is a prominent public intellectual, author of eighteen books located at the juncture between media and politics, and current chairman of the advisory board of AMEDI (Mexican Association of the Right to Information), a civil organization that has played a crucial role in pushing forward audience rights. However, the proliferation of such model should not be simply understood as the product of unforeseen conditions. In this line, Janeth Trejo Quintana (2016), researcher, policy advisor and coordinator of the Forum of Media and Information Literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean, claims that ‘the media system which was *created* in Mexico is of a strong concentration of private media’ [emphasis added].

Manuel Alejandro Guerrero (2016), media and policy researcher of Ibero-American University, policy advisor and member of the committee of the UNESCO chairs in Communications, explains how the media system has reproduced traits of the political system by affirming that their relationship was forged during the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic-electorate one: ‘these political actors were desperately after screen time. Before, during authoritarianism, it was not even important. With electoral competition, you have to please everyone’.

Such was the basis for what has been labelled a ‘perverse relationship’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016; Ávila, 2016). Guerrero explains that during the eighties the transitional process towards democracy coincided with the arrival of a new political elite that sported an electoral-democratic discourse. It must be clarified that Mexico was not formally an authoritarian regime, but the country was ruled by one party, PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), with virtually no opposition for over seventy years until the party lost the elections of 2000. At the time, Mexico was termed ‘the perfect dictatorship’ by the Peruvian Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa —an authoritarian regime disguised as a democracy—, supplemented with what the renowned political magazine *Nexos* more recently described as a low-intensity citizenship birthed by ‘one authoritarian parent and one democrat’ (Zuckermann, 2016).

As such, *democratic transition* is both a descriptive and analytical term that elucidates the processes and conditions that allowed democracies to asymmetrically develop during the second half of the XX century in Latin American countries (Boron, 2003). Guerrero (2016) explains that the advent of electoral competition gave visibility and importance to social sectors that were excluded from political participation during the authoritarian regimes. In this new electoral context political parties are reliant on votes and the exposure given by the media: in many cases, to reach these social sectors ‘they will continue using

clientelist policies through professional channels without using populist rhetoric, but a technical discourse on fighting poverty’.

According to Guerrero these practices persist during electoral periods, ‘in Mexico there is a very clear strategy to impoverish rural, suburban populations and arrive every six years with a pantry of groceries’. The evidence is that the three states that have received the most resources through poverty-aid programs are the states that continue to have the highest percentage of the population living under the line of poverty, ‘this means that the outcome of the programs to fight poverty is not to fight poverty, but to politically manage poverty’. To him, this clarifies why narrowing existing socioeconomic divides is not part of the agenda of political parties, similarly shedding light as to why clientelism became a common praxis during and beyond the period of democratic transition: people in these conditions represent ‘paradoxically, the tier of voters that takes them, through an open and democratic competition, to power’. Initially, he says, it seemed that the arrival of new actors in the electoral arena would go against the ‘clientelist spirit’, bringing along a more modern discourse of institutional efficiency, but in reality clientelist relations with different social and economic group prevail.

To Trejo Delarbre (2016), clientelism has principally an electoral character, and would disagree with the idea that the relation between media and political elites can be defined in such terms: ‘in this case I think this is a mutually beneficial relationship’, each having different spheres of authority and possibilities. He explains that clientelist practices occur when political parties ‘distribute money or goods among voters and thus manage to keep their votes’. An evenly balanced relationship, he affirms, was forged many years ago when the government, in exchange of a complacent disposition, granted a few media companies ‘licenses, tax exemptions, advertising, exemptions in the payment of fees’.

Despite divergences in definition, it is well acknowledged that there has been continuity in the beneficial character of this relationship. However, the telecommunications and broadcasting reform of 2013-14 unveiled an erosion of their long-standing ties, thereby opening up the possibility for stronger regulation, recognition of certain rights, and the addition of new actors. The attrition of their relationship represents a vital phase in the political and media timeline, as it allowed the constitutional reform to make room for longstanding citizens’ demands. Aleida Calleja (2016), former member of the advisory board of the media regulator, coordinator of advocacy of Observacom (Latin American Observatory of Regulation, Media and Convergence) and central associate of AMEDI in matters of citizen participation, affirms that none of the significant changes in the constitution were proposed by political parties, ‘all that was raised

in the constitutional reform has been part of the citizens' demands for quite a while'. Despite the shift in the country's political make-up at the turn of the millennium, it would be premature to talk of a fully realized democratic transition; nonetheless, the dwindling relation between media and political elites has left an opening for citizen participation, suggesting further consolidation of a democratic line in the political order of Mexico.

The 'diluted' reform: the advent of media regulation

According to Carlos Padilla (2016) –one of the sharpest observers of the media landscape over the last fifteen years through his magazine *Zócalo*, a specialized publication dedicated to media and political communication– the Telecommunications and Broadcasting reform of 2013-14 represents a turning point in the media landscape, one thirty years in the making. The year 2012 will witness the comeback of PRI to the presidency with Enrique Peña Nieto, who inaugurated his tenure with a grandiose reformist discourse; indeed, the telecom reform would be part of a larger wave of constitutional reforms, including one relevant to this research: education. In view of the lack of regulation that favoured the concentration of private media ownership while diminishing the relevance of public service, media observers consider that the reform was long overdue, 'since 1971 we had been operating with a Federal Law¹ on radio and television that came to change just a year ago. The lag we have in this area is impressive' (Trejo Quintana, 2016).

Although the telecommunications reform was introduced with triumphalist speeches on a very visible political scene, it concealed a public spirit: 'the constitutional and legal reform in broadcasting and telecommunications was adopted by the parties in 2012 because it was a demand that had decades, that had a social thrust' (Calleja, 2016). Some of the incorporated demands were 'the recognition of public media' (Padilla, 2016), 'the right of the audiences', 'the right to universal access to information and communications technology' (Calleja, 2016), and the legal recognition of 'indigenous and community media' (Gómez-Mont, 2016).

It is agreed upon that the constitutional reform represents a new chapter in the way media was to be regulated in Mexico, as typified by the unprecedented autonomous character of the new media regulatory organ, IFETEL (Federal Telecommunications Institute): 'there was already a telecom regulator, but it was not independent. This constitutional reform created the organ and also its

autonomy', displays Padilla (2016). In a way, the emergence of a new regulator was possible thanks to the deteriorating relationship between the media and the political elites, 'Televisa appeared very vulnerable... it seemed that the scale was finally beginning to tilt' (Guerrero, 2016).

Indeed, the modification and inclusion of several constitutional articles (refer to Appendix B to see the most relevant changes) suggested the advent of a more plural and diverse media landscape, characterized by its 'regulatory spirit' (Guerrero, 2016), the legal consolidation of public and community media, and the tardy recognition of the audiences. However, many of the changes established in the constitutional reform were to be watered down in the steps towards legislation², as noted by several observers: 'This constitutional reform was positive, but its best intentions were diluted in Federal Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting' (Guerrero, 2016); 'The reform was progressive and yet... in the Federal Law much of this intention of change was diluted in several ways' (Padilla, 2016); 'It seems to me that what the constitutional reform does is to take up citizens' demands which are then diluted with the Secondary Law, but some principles remained' (Calleja, 2016).

Some of the reasons the reform was 'diluted' conform to the discussions held previously in regards to policymaking hardly being a tidy, depoliticized process. As a reminder, Freedman (2015:98) asserts that media policy 'is messy and dirty'. As such, media policymaking cannot be regarded as a sphere of activity that is detached from social and political practices. Guerrero explains that during this process 'there was a moment of tension and some would say almost a rupture... between the federal government and Televisa'. In a way, we can understand the ensuing reform as a tug-of-war between the demands of the citizens and the will of the private media owners. Compelled both to uphold their new commitment to regulate the media, and to avoid their relations with influential media owners to sever entirely, the government had to find a compromise, 'At some point, the federal government, in a boastful display of complete autonomy... really considered the possibility of regaining control over the guidelines of economic competition of the State' (Guerrero, 2016).

Certainly, this attenuated version of the reform insinuated the restatement of the relations between the political and media elites. According to Guerrero (2016), 'there are a number of situations that will make the government rethink their alliance with the television'. The year 2014 witnessed some of the most high-profile political scandals in recent memory in Mexico, representing a severe 'blow to the image' of the government, not least the mass disappearance of the students in Ayotzinapa –event which gained considerable media resonance around the

world—, the civilian massacre in Tlatlaya, allegedly carried out by the military, and the corruption affair of ‘Casa blanca’, in which a lavish multimillion dollar property was traced back to the president Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife, a former actress of Televisa. ‘The discredited image of the federal government incited by these cases, particularly the presidency, makes their collusion indispensable’, signals Guerrero.

The mechanisms through which media owners influence legislation and policy are hard to miss: the pressure to thin down the ‘regulatory spirit’ of the reform was not exerted exclusively from the outside: ‘Congress is taken by the *telebancada*’ holds Ivonne Velasco (2015), academic and journalist specialized in media and communication who has worked as producer and host for public service media. *Telebancada* is a composite term which refers to a group of legislators with links to the broadcasting industry, acting in Congress with correspondence to this link (Mejía Barquera, 2015). Who are the members of the Commission of Radio, Television and Cinematography in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies?, questions Guerrero: ‘Former employees of Televisa, TV Azteca, Carlos Slim... there you have a very clear capture of the legislative bodies that are passing versions of the law’.

The up-and-coming media regulator

As a media regulator with unprecedented autonomy, attributions and mechanisms of accountability, IFETEL has a lot to prove. For instance, the regulator has assumed the authority of allocating broadcasting and telecom frequencies, an attribution that was the president’s alone (Padilla, 2016). However, in view of a democratic transition patched with corruption and lack of accountability, clientelist practices, compliance to private interests, etc., media observers and publics are paying careful attention to the regulator’s movements, often with generous doses of critical skepticism, ‘there are aspects that lead us to think that... their ascribed functions have some weak angles that lessen their authority’ (Padilla, 2016). Calleja (2016), who was a member of the advisory board of IFETEL in 2015, offers insight into one of these weak angles: ‘the relationship of IFETEL with the advisory council, at least where I was until January of this year, is almost zero, or conforms more like a space of symbolic presence than an actual process of discussion and dialogue with the decision makers’. Despite its possible deficiencies, it would be rushed to say that the regulator has not made its presence felt. Trejo Delarbre (2016), considers that Mexico has a regulatory authority whose decisions are antagonizing the big telecom and broadcasting companies:

‘when there are players in this scenario outraged with what the regulator does, I think the regulator is performing well’, but then strikes a balance in his appraisal: ‘However, I recognize that there are very strong omissions, very questionable decisions by IFETEL, errors and tardiness’.

It would be reasonable to say that, at such early stage, the regulator has a long way to reach institutional maturity. However, it would also be sensible to question whether this trend of initial missteps might be an indicator of underlying principles at work. In light of previous discussions held in this research, it is relevant to keep in mind that the regulator coexists with a media system rooted in liberal democratic principles, which has given way to a market-driven economic model that favors deregulation and privatization. As such, there is a need to factor in ideological forces and naturalized political practices when considering the obligations and challenges –current and forthcoming– the regulator has to face. If left alone, the regulator might sustain a selective relationship with privileged actors during the policymaking process, detached from public participation, ‘It’s a thing discussed between the regulator and the companies, but the big ones, not necessarily the smaller ones’ (Calleja, 2016).

Public policies and ‘spectral’ citizen participation

Among its functions, the regulator has the obligation to hold media companies accountable, and in order to sustain a democratic symmetry the regulator has to be accountable to the public. On these grounds, the previously alluded ‘symbolic’ relationship between the decision makers of IFETEL and the advisory board has important implications: within the legal framework, the board is intended to represent and articulate citizen participation, ‘the participation mechanisms as such are still quite weak, firstly because they are not established with transparency. Even with the case of the advisory board of IFETEL, its recommendations are not binding’ (Calleja, 2016). Trejo Delarbre (2016) complements this picture by clarifying that the advisory board ‘is composed primarily of people with technical knowledge but with little direct relation to the society’.

If the advisory board embodies to a significant degree the institutionalized mechanisms of citizen participation, Calleja’s assessment would suggest that the public’s involvement in the policymaking process is 1) lacking in dialogue and transparency, 2) is selective, and 3) its contributions are not legally binding. These points are congruent with Freedman’s (2015) previously examined idea of the alienation of public participation from decision-making processes. As it has been

argued, media literacy could be a means to reduce existing distances between the citizens and public policy processes, or encourage the public to question the symbolic character of their involvement and demand decision-making power, 'these processes continue to occur unattended, without discussion, without even being used by sectors of society that could benefit from them if there was more interest and more information. The discussion about these issues is sometimes difficult because it seems very technical even if it's not, as such it still only interests very discernible but small groups within civil society' (Trejo Delarbre, 2016).

This assessment is reminiscent of Freedman's (2015:104) description of the 'spectral quality' of media policy: 'the perception that policy environments require a level of expertise and resources' that are unattainable for most citizens. The equivalence does not end there: Freedman himself, being a British academic involved in media policy, states that despite receiving invitations to attend policy seminars, 'access to the core of the decision-making process always seems out of reach, shaped by external forces that are often neither present nor accountable', which resonates with Guerrero's (2016) own appreciation: 'when the legislature wants to act as if they take society into account, they usually organize forums and in these forums they invite academics, but it's practically to ratify decisions that have already been made'. Facing this setup, media literate citizens could demand and shape a more comprehensive and inclusive interpretation of citizen participation, one that does not only take into account an (rhetorical) advisory council comprised of experts, but also ordinary members of civil society, 'citizen participation should go through the full cycle of public policy, from the location of the public problem to the evaluation', and as such, redefining the edges of what this project terms 'spectral participation' in policymaking.

Calleja (2016) offers further valuable insight into the limitations of such understanding of citizen participation:

...it seems to me we have a serious problem in general in bureaucracies to understand what citizen participation is. Usually citizen participation in IFETEL has to do with issuing public consultations, talking with some of the regulated, not all, and is an institution that takes criticism very badly. Instead of thinking that criticism is an input to improve public policy, helping locate the bottlenecks in public policy, it is assumed as an attack. And if you look at this sector, the problem in public policy and civic participation starts from the definition of the public problem, because an essential part of public policy is that you determine what the public problem is so that you can derive strategies, goals, indicators, the entire cycle until evaluation.

This finding is of interest because it shows that the full cycle of public policies – from the assessment, design and implementation all the way through the evaluation– has a top-down rather than a bottom-up course of action. This approach operates on the assumption that the public, especially those with fewer resources, lack the elements to identify their needs and propose solutions.

Furthermore, Calleja's appreciation opens the opportunity to revisit and examine under a new light a central debate explored previously regarding media policies: the use of empirical data and metrics in policy decisions. The discussion was guided by scholars from the US and Europe whom share the idea that the use of empirical evidence in policymaking is based on a questionable premise; mainly that it is rooted on the assumption that empirical indicators presuppose an apolitical, objective and neutral approach. The main contention is that normative questions cannot be easily given quantifiable answers and they need to be more adequately contextualized, an argument that is relevant to any context.

If one considers that the autonomy of the regulatory body has just recently been instituted, relations between political and media elites remain vigorous, and constitutional reforms are diluted in the process to legislation by pressure groups with direct influence in legislative spaces, there is a need to reassess the role that empirical evidence can play in policymaking. In this sense, what shape does the empirical/normative debate take in a media landscape such as the one laid out thus far?

Pitting normative against empirical accounts

In Mexico, it would appear that Freedman's (2015:99) 'media policy silences' – the gaps in process and tacit assumptions– are overturned, "The design of public policy in the Mexican case rarely, and only for very specific areas, has taken into account empirical studies that benefit collective values such as pluralism, accountability and equality' (Guerrero, 2016). Given that in Mexico these "silences" often occur without any identifiable substantiation, there is a perception that empirical evidence would make policy decisions more transparent, accountable and legitimate.

The arguments posed by media scholars in Europe and the US are reasonable: certainly, like Karppinen (2015:293) suggests 'the reliance on empirical measurements tends to skew policy-making towards market-driven objectives and prejudice against intangible cultural and social objectives, which tend to be by nature abstract and more difficult to quantify'. However, the scenario in Mexico

comes to show that more normative-driven policy decisions embedded in cultural values can also fall short without empirical support.

For instance, despite indigenous and community media attaining legal recognition in the reform - an intangible and normative demand founded on cultural principles - their operative and financial autonomy remains obstructed without the evidence accounting for their need to use their airwaves as they see fit, 'the indigenous media are still struggling to get permits to be able to do advertising...the most delicate issue in indigenous communities is the radio, because the radio in these communities is part of the structure of their whole life, it's not a radio to entertain, it's a radio to inform, and often in the geographically difficult locations they inhabit the only thing that works to give warnings of hurricanes, droughts, pests, and medicine, is the radio', says Carmen Gómez-Mont (2016), an academic specialized in the use of information and communication technologies in educational, social and cultural contexts who has focused her research on indigenous communities for nearly two decades.

In a similar line, public service media are not entitled to commercialize airtime under the unbacked (and extravagant) argument by the CIRT³ (National Chamber of Radio and Television Broadcasters) that it would represent 'disloyal competition' (Padilla, 2016). The consequence of not having financial independence is that, to many, public service media often function as an extension of particular political regimes: 'we can discuss a lot about how we call them *public service media*. To me they aren't, in any case they may be government-owned media' [emphasis added] (Trejo Quintana, 2016); 'The radio and television stations in the states remain under the control of the governors' (Padilla, 2016). Along this line, Calleja (2016) calls for 'strengthening public service media to prevent them from being government-owned media'. Unlike Sweden and the UK, where the financial and administrative autonomy of the public service media is safeguarded by TV licenses, the policies in Mexico make public service media financially reliant on the government.

In this context, Karpinen's (2015:288) important claim that empirically-driven decisions 'should also be seen as political' is not annulled, rather empirical evidence could serve as a handhold when navigating the obscured environment of policymaking, 'if you look at public documents of IFETEL, on many issues there are no indicators, there are no metrics, there is no evaluation, there is no support that let us clearly locate why a particular public policy is being implemented' (Calleja, 2016). These insights find a supporting voice in Freedman (2014:176), who is aware that in certain contexts, as this research validates, there is 'always a danger that by choosing not to focus on empirical data, some normative accounts

lack verifiability, or more precisely, relevance to particular political and economic contexts. Of course, there is no reason why normative accounts should be counterposed to empirically based studies'. Based on a study on concentration and diversity of the telecom in Mexico, Huerta-Wong and Gómez García (2013) point out that the nature of the discussion on concentration has remained normative, to the point of changing 'regulations on media without diagnosis or data to support these reforms.' As such, the authors argue that there is a need to advance the debate on an explanatory basis with empirical evidence.

As we have seen, the reform has incorporated demands that have a democratic thrust (i.e. the autonomy of the regulatory organ; audience and community media rights), but, at least in part, the lack of practical, observable evidence has resulted in the dismantling of some of these underlying assumptions. As such, the argument is that this environment requires an approach to policy making that integrates both normative assumptions and empirical evidence, while being mindfully attentive to the limitations and possibilities of each approach. In other words, a normative architecture held together by empirical substance.

Media literacy education can prove an important contribution to help forwarding this debate by providing citizens with participatory tools and knowledge: 'What is clear is that if you do not have enough information to know how the media system operates, you lack elements of participation. That is, when people start to realize that what is in the media is part of their rights, the logic changes' (Calleja, 2016).

Promoting media literacy in citizens can be relevant to matters beyond public awareness and participation in policy matters; as it has been noted, the majority of media literacy literature focuses on the skills and knowledge of people in their interaction with the media, either as audiences –in particular with traditional media such as TV or radio– and more recently as users/producers of new media. Thus, in order to address the scenario that media literacy education faces, it is important to examine the dichotomy of the old/new media as they presently exist in Mexico.

The 'new communicative scenario': concentration, pluralism and new media

It has been emphasized that ownership of media is an important analytical and ideological category. Two angles of the telecom reform that have been subject to scrutiny by media observers are the emergence of the autonomous regulator and

the approval of two new television networks. Diversifying the broadcasting landscape in an era of rapid growth and expansion of digital media may seem like an outmoded demand in certain media contexts. In Mexico this is not the case, and it serves as the foundation for a vibrant and multi-layered debate, ‘over fifty maybe sixty million Mexicans have no other choice of entertainment and information than the same television of always’, points out Trejo Delarbre (2016). In line with earlier discussions, the increasing presence of the internet and digital media in the contemporary media landscape has led free-market supporters (private media stakeholders like the CIRT) to question the relevance of ownership regulation: ‘what they think is that we are over-regulated’ (Trejo Quintana, 2016), which offers a glimpse of their underlying ideological assumptions about ownership: regulation as a ‘barrier’ to growth and a ‘violation’ of free speech (Freedman, 2014).

Despite the increasing relevance of digital media, ‘even if the internet’s coverage in Mexico has increased a great deal, it’s not yet reached the majority of the population. Approximately 50% have regular connections. The other half do not and are still dependent on television’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016). In reality the estimated number is closer to 45% (INEGI, 2015), and if one adds to this that the two new TV networks are yet to surface (Padilla, 2016), and take into account the limited coverage of public service broadcasting (Ávila, 2016), it means that a sizeable amount of the population is still captive to the kind of content engendered by a concentrated broadcasting market that lacks quality (Padilla, 2016) and diversity (Trejo Delarbre, 2016), reproduces gender (Velasco, 2015), ethnic (Gómez-Mont, 2016), socioeconomic and racial (Ávila, 2016) dominant representations, and conveys their audiences as consumers rather than as citizens (Orozco, 2016). These severe critiques are consistent with the exodus of specific audiences who are migrating to other platforms, ‘quite a few segments of society who disagree with the traditional behavior of television are simply no longer watching television, more and more Mexicans watch other options, such as cable television, the internet or DVDs’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016).

In light of this, Padilla (2016) believes that IFETEL should put into effect their authority and demand better quality and pluralism in content from private broadcasters. In opposition, Calleja (2016) is of the view that content regulation can be a thorny conduit, ‘there is no doubt that we must establish policies that encourage internal pluralism in the media, but that runs into a very thin fabric that has to do with censorship and freedom of expression... the best way to protect freedom of expression is to promote pluralism and diversity in media ownership’. Much like Lizárraga Salas and Bravo Torres Coto (2015) stated earlier, Trejo

Delarbre (2016) is not as confident about the effectiveness of this approach to ensure pluralism: 'Diversity of media ownership initially enables different content, but it does not guarantee it. In Mexico, when Televisa began to have commercial competition in TV Azteca, what TV Azteca did was to mimic the content that Televisa produced rather than offer new one'. Trejo Delarbre's assertion is compatible with Noam's (2009) former claim: diversity in ownership does not portend diversity in content. His argument goes that the negative characteristics of media do not necessarily derive from trends of concentration, but need to be understood as products of profit-oriented media structures, which is equally consistent with Trejo Delarbre's further take: 'I think they're going to keep betting on the old schemes with which they have done business for many years. There will be diversity with other companies, initially yes, but there is no absolute certainty that it'll be so, because, I insist, the Mexican public that still watches television is the most conservative audience in terms of media preferences, having fewer options to access and consume content'.

Nevertheless, Trejo Delarbre (2016) believes that 'we are in new communicative scenario'. The arrangement of this new scenario, however, is an on-going, intricate process. In view of a social reality that withstands any uniformed and consistent categorization, understanding the role that digital media is playing presumes similar complexities. As such, the causes that have led to the digital divide are hardly homogenous and do not entirely correspond to the socioeconomic divides, 'the non-connected are not necessarily the poorest... rather, it's a regional and generational gap that goes all across the country'.

In Mexico the topic of digital media has given rise to multiple debates, each with numerous perspectives. As a result, the consents found in other media discussions shine for their absence. This is important because, as will be shown, in the more institutional agendas of media literacy the borders between digital and media literacy are being effectively blurred. In a scenario of such acute concentration of private media ownership, the advent of digital media has brought about enthusiastic discourses of deliberate democracy. This research has made an effort to avoid the trap of letting digital media command the whole spectrum of media literacy efforts in Mexico (see Mihailidis, 2015), not least because it would misrepresent the current media landscape or consolidate existing divides. Trejo Delarbre's claim that Mexico has entered a new communicative scenario gives off a deterministic and overly optimistic fragrance. In any case, it would be more accurate to say that Mexico is in a transition period. Irma Ávila (2016), a social communicator who has received numerous national and international awards as a

media educator of children and youth in Mexico, affirms that ‘Television is still *the big one*’.

As previously stated, there are elements that provide evidence that the political and media elites have an interest in sustaining a well-oiled relationship; keeping certain social sectors below the poverty line with deficient education and restricted access to diverse sources of information is crucial to keep the electoral mechanisms running, ‘education is the subject through which the country can begin to have information, can make more demands and ask for more justice...obviously the government is not interested in having an intelligent population’, reflects Gómez-Mont (2016) who has spent the last twenty-five years educating public schools teachers on the adoption of media equipment in the classroom, ‘Television is a large element of disinformation in Mexico, but people have the TV on six, eight hours a day’. To Gómez-Mont, this entails that students without a regular internet connection at home find in television their only source of information, ‘if you look at the quality of Mexican television, it’s regrettable in every way... and reading levels are very low, I think the average is two books a year’.

It would be equally valuable, nonetheless, to look across the divide to those with regular connections. Guerrero (2016) submits an encouraging view about some of the benefits that digital media have brought about: ‘the journalists who are failing to publish their research about sensitive issues for public opinion such as corruption, drug trafficking, etc., are using digital spaces with great success in middle-class urban sectors. Not everyone but say, qualitatively, there is a group demanding much more accurate, more critical information’. This demonstrates that among certain sectors of educated, middle-class, urban populations, digital media have offered alternatives to the hegemonic sources of information. Newspaper readership in Mexico is distinctly low and in decline. *La Prensa*, a tabloid focused on sensationalist news known for its graphic front pages, is the highest circulating newspaper in Mexico with a daily rotation of 276,624 copies (SEGOB, 2016), a number that represents roughly 0.25% of the population. This suggests that until the emergence of the internet and digital media, television had gone virtually unchallenged as the main source of information for the non-indigenous population. Despite low reading rates, comparatively newspapers represent a much more diversified media market than telecommunications (Huerta-Wong et al., 2013).

Following Guerrero’s perspective, the increasing access to internet among educated, middle-class segments and the ensuing proliferation of alternative news outlets begs the question: are existing news readers simply migrating to digital platforms, thus finding more availability of content diversity; or are digital media

helping previously disengaged people to become interested in news and civic matters? In other words: has the wide-spread adoption of the internet and the ensuing diversification of news sources engendered interest in news? To some media observers it seems unlikely: ‘of those who are connected to the internet, only a small portion is interested...in news spaces’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016); ‘you’ll see that most internet users in Mexico are under twenty-four ... and they mainly use it to chat, to check movie showtimes, theatre, sports’ (Gómez-Mont, 2016); ‘there is a strategy to draw the attention of internet users to the same kind of content already offered by mass and hegemonic media’ (Moreno, 2015).

Moreover, the idea of the internet and digital media as fertile spaces for democratic deliberation in which traditional models of concentration of ownership are displaced by plural and diverse ones is challenged: ‘if you go to an analysis of how the internet functions... you’ll realize that there is a process of brutal concentration’, states Calleja (2016), who goes on to reference the different layers of concentration one can come across on the internet, from infrastructure and service providers, to search engines. According to Mouffe (in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006:968), new media are not automatically ‘supportive to the creation of an agonistic public space’. Furthermore, this confirms the formerly examined positions of Hindman (2008) and Doyle (2015), who question whether the proliferation of accesses to information has contributed to diversity and pluralism, taking into account that search engines tend to direct users to popular content.

In a media landscape such as the one in Mexico, the scepticism conveyed by Calleja is reasonable: conceiving digital media as mechanisms inclined to disrupt naturalized processes of concentration can pose considerable risks to the efforts realized in regards to attaining pluralism and diversity in the overall media system. They can also be used to articulate opportunistic policies accompanied by a surplus of triumphal, *progressive* discourses such as the aforementioned project *México Conectado*, which promises no less than ushering Mexico into the information and knowledge society. These arguments follow the same logic as Freedman’s (2014) criticism of free-market supporters who question if ownership rules are even relevant in today’s media market. It is, at its core, an ideological discussion, ‘what you have is an overwhelming presence of dominant discourses and information that breed in different areas, but there is no room for local content, regional content, for pluralism, and the truth is that there is an illusory situation with social networks above all: they move in concentric circles’ (Calleja, 2016). Trejo Delarbre’s (2016) view takes off from the same epicentre: ‘the digital environment is very conducive for exercising freedom, but there are limited

formats and little demand of its users for a real discussion of ideas to happen'. This means that the resulting diversity and pluralism brought along by new media does not presuppose a mindful and far-reaching use by its publics, forwarding the case for media literacy.

In light of these discussions, the research will examine the emerging media literacy movement in Latin America and Mexico as understood and promoted by its main sponsor, UNESCO, and how it might complement with, and diverge from the kind of critical pluralist media literacy principles put forward by this project.

UNESCO: Media *and* information literacy?

This project argues that the adoption of 'media literacy' as a concept is not simply a matter of semantics. 'Media literacy' is a loaded term that cannot be confined to the isolated meeting between the 'media reader' and the 'text'. It has been stressed repeatedly how media literacy is inevitably an inclusive phenomenon, which has to take into account the context in which that encounter takes place; meaning the broader social, political and economic processes that determine it (Buckingham, 2007). Such perspective would explain the efforts of UNESCO to initiate and articulate a movement in Latin America *from* the perspective of media literacy: 'this is the name that is adopted thanks to the convening power of UNESCO' (Trejo Quintana, 2016). The involvement of UNESCO has not been trivial, 'UNESCO got seriously involved six, seven years ago with the subject of literacy, before they had been a bit on the outside, sympathizing', reflects Guillermo Orozco (2016) who, as one of the leading audience reception researchers in Mexico and Latin America for more than twenty years, was recently appointed as director of the UNESCO chair on Media and Information Literacy in Mexico.

To some extent, the reason that UNESCO became actively involved in the subject has to do with the increasing presence and relevance of the media and other information sources in societies around the world. From the outset, UNESCO will press to bring 'information literacy' and 'media literacy' together, 'UNESCO will take up two things: one is media, and the other is information' (Orozco, 2016). UNESCO labels it 'media and information literacy', and this is the nomenclature that is being adopted in the Latin America region. Their website defines it as a 'holistic approach to literacy', recognizing that 'Media literacy and information literacy are traditionally seen as separate and distinct fields' (UNESCO, 2016). Orozco (2016) explains that the 'media' end of the equation refers to any form of communication media and 'information' stands for

‘everything else’. Some of the literacies borne by ‘information’ are: ‘internet literacy’, ‘computer literacy’, ‘news literacy’, ‘library literacy’, and even ‘freedom of expression literacy’.

Indeed, UNESCO espouses a generous notion of literacy. ‘Information literacy’ unpacks a multiplicity of sources that do not reveal an explicit connection to ‘literacy’, if one is to be somewhat committed to the original meaning of the analogy. Buckingham (2007:148) says that this fashionable proliferation of literacies ‘raises some significant questions’. To begin with, such compliant use of ‘literacy’ expands the application of the term to the point where the original analogy is lost.

It can be argued that the purpose of bringing together fields perceived traditionally as ‘separate and distinct’ can follow a similar to logic Buckingham’s (2007) argument: the term ‘literacy’ conveys a degree of social status, attaching it to lower status forms (such as television) ‘is to make an implicit claim for the latter’s validity as an object of study’ (p.148). In view of the legitimacy that ‘media literacy’ conveys for its broader tradition as an object of study and curricular development, it carries a higher status than ‘information literacy’. As such, there seems to be an implicit intention to validate the latter through the status of the former. Buckingham (2007:146) explains that media literacy has faced an uphill struggle to gain recognition within education systems and policymaking. Attaching ‘information’ to ‘media literacy’ raises some questions as to whether this arrangement is devised as a shortcut, as a way of latching the emerging field of ‘information literacy’ onto the achieved recognition of ‘media literacy’ by scholars or policymakers. However, the enlargement of the term can also be seen as the consolidation of field that encompasses the full scope of interactions between media and communication.

It is important to be aware that ‘information’ is a disputed and value-laden term, in particular framed within the ‘information society’ and ‘knowledge society’ debate that arose from the World Summit on the Information Society conferences that took place in 2003 in Geneva and in 2005 in Tunis, where much was ‘questioned about why information society and not knowledge society, because these are two very different concepts...that have crossing points, but are not compatible’ (Gómez-Mont, 2016). Gómez-Mont further explains that there was a widespread belief that through the ‘information society a more egalitarian and just society was going to be achieved, and that’s how this project started’. However, she points out that when crisis hit big business, they found in the ‘information society’ a highly profitable data-processing society, ‘Microsoft, Google, you can scroll through them one by one and you’ll realize that there isn’t

a big difference between them and what General Motors, Ford, Renault were doing at the time’.

This is the main basis why ‘media literacy’ a standalone term can be less problematic and closer to the civic aims of this research; nonetheless, in view of the prominent role UNESCO is playing in the adoption and articulation of media literacy in Latin American and Mexico, it is important to further a dialogue about this and other conceptual implications. At the same, it is necessary to be aware that, despite having a cultural powerhouse actively promoting media (and information) literacy, the responsibility of developing an understanding of the concept suited to the particular needs and demands of this context lies with local actors: scholars, organizations, citizens, institutions and even media hailing *from* the Latin American region in general, and Mexico specifically, ‘political culture as well as the social and economic context that exists in Mexico are different from England or Spain ... where the media system is constituted mainly by state television, and that makes differences when implementing certain measures, policies or public programs’ (Trejo Quintana, 2016).

Mexico as a platform for media literacy in LATAM

There have been two events in Mexico that have served as assembly points for an array of actors to ‘start exploring the subject in a more articulate, more systematic way in Mexico and the [Latin American] region’, says Trejo Quintana (2016), who in December 2014 coordinated the first media literacy forum, ‘we took on the task of contacting different experts who are not only in academia, but also on other fronts that seem very important... such as the private initiative, the civil society, even artists’. The forum was pushed forward by the then director of TV UNAM in alliance with the Autonomous University of Barcelona, sponsored by the Public Broadcasting System of the Mexican State, so its management and aims were not under the control of, or determined by, the vision of one single entity. ‘Out of this came what is now the Latin American and Caribbean Observatory of Media and Information Literacy’ says Trejo Quintana, which reveals an ambition to approach media literacy in a regional and concerted manner, ‘different universities in the region are willing to do efforts of dissemination, from research as well as direct actions, field work, experiences that have to do with media literacy in the region’.

The complexity of organizing a regional approach to media education –with a healthy diversity of perspectives, ambitions, skills and needs– points to an on-

going project with considerable challenges ahead. Thus, despite the regional support from certain institutional actors, media literacy should be conceived as an open-ended subject of study with distinct aims and policies that cannot be applied across-the-board in such a diverse region, 'you always need to see how it's being done, from which outlook, from which perspective, with what kind of scope', explains Trejo Quintana (2016) concerning the challenges posed by the diversity of the educational system in Mexico, a point the project will revisit later on.

The Observatory has proven a challenge to operate given the of lack of institutional stability, intermittent academic support and her own workload as a post-doc researcher, 'it's a very interesting project, it would be very regrettable if it faltered along the way', admits Trejo Quintana, who disclosed that she serves as the only regional liaison of the Observatory, an organization, 'I'm doing everything alone... I proposed... to get at least two more people to help me; it has been a lot of work'.

The other event is the UNESCO-UNITWIN-UNAOC Chair on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue hosted by the University of Guadalajara. Inaugurated in November 2015 and directed by Guillermo Orozco (2016), he considers that 'in Latin America it is a very new subject, in fact media and information literacy is quite new, most do not understand what it is about'. He illustrates this point by recounting his involvement as the representative of Spanish America in a UNESCO project that examined media literacy education programs worldwide to see if they include privacy violation and harassment issues in digital spaces as part of their curriculum, 'In Latin America, of the ninety programs I found, only eight mention it in a way that is left unclear'.

Orozco also perceives media literacy as an open-ended subject, and believes that encounters like the forum and the Chair can serve as important platforms to ponder and refine the communication rights of media audiences 'but there is much to be done', he admits. These events have been followed by the production of documents and publications, but which are yet to influence educational and political agendas in the country. As one would expect, Orozco is not ill-informed about the inaccessibility of legislation and government policy, 'it's complex because one thing is that we define them, and one that we manage to enclose them in a general regulation. We must dream to ever be put in the constitution of the media'.

His restrained optimism opens the door to an important discussion: to organize the event they required the consent of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), suggesting that the highest government authority in education in Mexico is aware

of the increasing need and demand for media literacy programs. Nevertheless, Orozco reminds us that, ultimately, institutions are comprised of people: ‘when we made the request to get support there was an ambassador, after the change of the Minister of Education the ambassador is no longer there. In less than one year they changed all the authorities of the SEP’. This kind of detachment from the State is consistent with what this research has previously established, as it corresponds with the disengagement displayed by IFETEL in regards to matters of civic education. In light of the increasing interest from academics and international agencies such as UNESCO, it is relevant to examine what the public and private sectors can do and are doing for media literacy.

The role of State and private media in *functional* literacy

Attempts by advocates to make the State incorporate some form of media literacy education to school curricula in Mexico are not new, ‘I always had that goal’ exposes Orozco (2016), who has had to struggle against the disinterest from the Ministry of Public Education and the distrust of teachers towards media, ‘teachers don’t believe that the media can educate, just as they cannot understand that if there was media literacy we could take advantage of the negative effects of the media ... they believe that the media is something that students interact with outside the classroom’. He thinks that, with some exceptions, it comes down to teachers not desiring critical students who can question their position of authority, ‘it is a vice of teachers in educational systems, they believe they have the truth and what they want is for students to learn and repeat by heart down to the last comma, they don’t want them to think’.

However, the responsibility of endorsing media literacy education should not fall on the Ministry of Public Education alone. In the UK, together with the Department for Education and Skills, the media regulator Ofcom was appointed to promote media literacy in formal education (Buckingham, 2013). In this regard, IFETEL should be playing a significant part; yet, not only are their efforts virtually inexistent, but it looks as if they are leaving the task of promoting media literacy to private companies:

The project guidelines of IFETEL on the rights of audiences state that the dealers will have to create campaigns of media literacy, which received a lot of criticism because many believe that this is a responsibility of the State. In any case the concessionaires are obliged to broadcast these campaigns, even to generate resources for these campaigns, but the design of the campaigns should be borne by

the State... I cannot see them really making media literacy campaigns talking against their own talk shows. I find it completely absurd. (Calleja, 2016)

Calleja's criticism is hard to object, and no matter how perplexing IFETEL's guidelines may seem, they fall within the ideological framework previously established in this project: the media structure has managed to naturalize capitalist relations and secure market-driven politics. The implications of this are significant, as it means that the same structure of media ownership that has been able to stimulate concentration (Freedman, 2013) and gain access to regulatory spaces (Guerrero, 2016; Padilla, 2016), also has the capacity to secure and shape media literacy according to their needs, as oppose to the democratic needs of the publics. Ávila (2016) thinks that 'no organization or association with strong investors in media companies and advertisers' should be in charge of media literacy. Moreno (2015), suggests that 'there is already a form of media literacy carried out by Televisa'. Velasco (2015) completes this picture: 'Their criteria are economic. They are training the new client, they are alphabetizing the audience, and they're being taught what to consume, what to believe, what else they should like, they are promoting the type of consumer they need... the media are already doing it, because our ministries of education are not'.

What kind of 'alphabetized' publics would result from media literacy campaigns as conceived by private interests? This project argues that, optimistically, it would yield *functional* media literate publics. Buckingham (2007:150) says that a 'literate' person is not simply defined as a person with basic competences, and that the notion of literacy implies a more reflexive approach, 'it involves a broader understanding of the social, economic and institutional contexts of communication, and how these affect people's experiences and practices'. To him, *functional* literacy denotes the basic skills needed to perform specific operations without going far beyond this, an idea endorsed by Velasco (2015), 'in Mexico...we don't have a large margin of illiterate people, and yet literate people are functional literates... if we don't understand what we read, the truth is that it's very likely that we cannot understand what we see'.

This discussion has multiple points of tension. For instance, Buckingham (2007) considers that there is a tension between a social or critical model of media literacy and a competency-based approach. It can be argued that a critical-pluralistic media literacy approach explored in this research adheres to the critical models. UNESCO seems to adopt a dual approach, based on the one hand in the development of reflective and analytical capabilities (Orozco, 2016) and secondly on the acquisition of basic skills with emphasis on the 'informational'.

In line with what Ávila, Calleja, Moreno and Velasco claim, the fact that the private industry ends up at the helm of media literacy campaigns means that there is a natural point of tension between their commodity-oriented way of managing their information and the purpose of media literacy which, at its basic, should seek to teach audiences about responsible and critical engagement with the media. Naturally this means that private media would gain from targeting *functional* literate publics, 'we have the right to be addressed not only as consumers but also as citizens', Orozco agrees. This research argues that, facing the media, consumers need functional literacy; citizens need critical literacy.

But Trejo Quintana (2016) would not immediately dismiss the contribution of the industry, 'I think that companies, even the companies that have a monopoly on television in Mexico... have to join in, because what we have seen is that there are many important players', but acknowledges the evident risk, 'but of course, if the law says that those who must do media literacy are the private [companies], then we are toast, they do not care because it doesn't yield them any profit'. This research argues that for publics to be treated as citizens, media literacy has to go beyond endowing people with basic competence. The contribution of private media to media literacy makes the involvement of State institutions, in particular IFETEL and SEP, ever more crucial. In this context, it is vital for media literacy programs to become part of formal education.

Media literacy education in Mexican schools: challenges and needs

The educational system itself represents one of the biggest challenges to media literacy, 'the topic of education in Mexico is *the* topic, in capital letters' [emphasis added], considers Gómez-Mont (2016). Velasco (2015) ponders that learning how to move in an increasingly complex and mediatized world is 'as important as knowing how to add, subtract, multiply'. This research has shown that, in this complex context, designing media literacy policies and introducing media literacy to school curricula are desirable measures. But this same complexity demands thoughtful attention and ever-finer considerations as to how to move towards media literacy in schools in Mexico.

As it has been pointed out, advocates have made a case for media education to become part of the curricula of basic education, 'It's been a battle of a long time for some organizations. They have been able to do media literacy but always as an extramural activity' (Calleja, 2016). Along this line, Irma Ávila (2016) has developed an 'extramural' participatory methodology which considers children as

subjects and citizens. She believes that part of the reason media literacy has not made its way into formal education is that Mexico is not a society of dialogue, in which people are 'not prepared to listen, and least of all a child'. To her, the educational system reflects this 'adult-centric' worldview, 'the adult-centrism in schools is so great that when adults talk children remain silent. When they reach adulthood, what happens with their obligations as responsible citizens who must participate in the development of the country?', she wonders, understanding that in the context of Mexico media literacy education's aim is ultimately that of civic engagement, 'in this broader context of a democratic country, media education becomes essential for children to take advantage of the tools that the society of information and knowledge gives them'. A second reading shows that the educational system reflects the paternalistic nature of clientelist relationships that are characteristic of Mexican democracy. In this regard, it is important to examine the educational system within broader social and institutional contexts.

The wave of reforms of 2013-14 did not leave education behind. However it is recognized that this reform has had an administrative spirit rather than a pedagogical one, resulting in an intense and on-going conflict between the unions and the government 'the approach is completely focused on the control of teacher unions... instead of at the same time raising the issue of quality' (Guerrero, 2016). Along this line, Trejo Quinta (2016) considers that the education reform 'has received lots of criticism because precisely the last thing it did was to get into content and pedagogy'. Adding to the educational system's weak angles of pedagogy, quality and content, the measures taken by the authorities to guarantee the application of the educational evaluation –the core mandate of the reform– call into question its democratic character, 'you cannot speak of a great democratic government with a fledgling information society if they have to send in the army to make sure the teachers answer the questionnaires during the evaluative tests. This happened in Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas' (Gómez-Mont, 2016).

The fact that such incidents have transpired in these three states deserves more detailed consideration. As previously noted, they represent the three poorest states and the main beneficiaries of politically-administered anti-poverty programs. This is an important insight because electoral clientelist practices seem to flourish on the same grounds as some of the rooted practices that the education reform is trying to overhaul: misinformation, 'the problem with the teachers is that they used to buy their positions, and some people thought it was legal... they also think it's legal to sell the vote... imagine the level of misinformation in Mexico that these legal and democratic issues are not clearly understood'.

These three states not only represent significant clienteles for political parties, but also typify another of the challenges that media literacy faces: the diversity of social realities in Mexico, ‘Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas are the states that make up about 60% of the indigenous population and linguistic diversity’ (Gómez-Mont, 2016). This echoes the argument made in light of Hindman’s contention over digital democracy about the need of valuing the digital divide in this particular context. ‘Diversity’ and ‘divide’ are not interchangeable terms, but both terms are essential analytical categories to understand the full range of the landscape media literacy faces in Mexico. The educational system in Mexico could be understood as an embodiment of the diversity and divides seen in the country. To illustrate, in K-12 education, around 15% of students attend private schools (Abundis et al, 2014), ‘the disparity between the public and private sectors in Mexico is an abyss’, admits Gómez-Mont (2016) in regards to the available resources in class.

Trejo Quintana (2016) agrees that making broad media literacy policies and applying them indiscriminately would be counterproductive, ‘in Mexico we have this partition by region where we must always consider the context for any type of intervention, and any kind of public policy we want to implement. If you do not know them well, I find it difficult to conceive that an idea like this may fructify’. This scenario defies any standardized approach to media literacy, meaning that UNESCO’s pan-regional curricular ambitions must be refined against the vast diversity that exists in Latin America. Their role as promoter and sponsor has been of great importance and their continuous involvement is decisive for expanding the visibility and credibility of media literacy in the region; as such, this project has aspired to nurture their conceptual and curriculum implementation in the Mexican context.

Towards a critical pluralist media literacy model

In line with Buckingham’s reflections, the different discussions addressed in this research have sought to insert media literacy within broader social, economic and institutional contexts, in order to offer a critical and evaluative reflection of a desirable model of media literacy for Mexico. As it has been stressed, the kind of approach to media literacy that this project espouses has to provide democratic and civic benefits. This is the material from which the normative framework is assembled. Throughout analysis, there have been points where the research has tried to offer more refined looks into the internal workings and assumptions of such normativity. In consideration of the above findings and insights, this project will envisage a consistent model of media literacy. As stated in a previous chapter,

the limitations are numerous, so this section does not seek to develop a fully-fledged methodology or a curriculum for teachers, but rather to round up the main aspects of a prospective model to lay the ground for possible policy recommendations:

Citizenship: It has been established that UNESCO's approach to media literacy has an emphasis on the cultural, lacking an explicit civic-democratic component. Orozco (2016) agrees with the broader aim of this project: 'I think it is worth working with that, precisely because it is lacking, and for Mexico it would be a very good contribution... UNESCO has a lot on cultural rights, the right to education, but there isn't a very strong concept of citizenship, from what I've seen so far is it not addressed'. Trejo Quintana (2016) thinks that, taken to its logical conclusion, media literacy is not only about learning or acquiring skills to be critical before the messages we receive from the media, 'but that it would bring benefits to improve our reflection as citizens, and therefore the quality of democracy'.

This fits well within the confines of the democratic debates found throughout the research, in particular matters of concentration and pluralism of ownership and content, the existing divides and citizen participation in public policy. In this way, much like Buckingham (2005) and Mihailidis (2015) put forward, media literacy cannot be restricted to the effects debate, where the objective is to 'protect' powerless students and other citizens from negative media effects, 'it should not only be an instrument for protection', coincides Ávila (2016); rather, in order to make media literacy relevant to democratic issues in Mexico, it should extend to structural participation.

Knowledge over information: As such, if the government pretends to 'usher Mexico into the information and knowledge society' by guaranteeing internet access to everyone and make the promotion of citizen participation in public policy development one of their objectives, then it follows, like Calleja affirms, that citizens must acquire elements of participation together with these tools. This goes in line with this project's critical stance towards a competency-based approach that could engender *functional* literacy, rather than *critical* literacy. As it was mentioned, information society and knowledge society are not interchangeable, and each have diverging implications, 'The information society is completely vertical, and obeys to all the demand for data processing from very big companies...By knowledge we understand it as the use of information to transform the very different realities that each person may have' (Gómez-Mont, 2016). Going with both 'information and knowledge society' seems like a political compromise rather than an authentic democratic aspiration, 'they use the term

information society because they do not want to commit to *knowledge societies*, because it involves a whole democratic project that Mexico has not yet taken up', points out Gómez-Mont. Rather than an information-focused, competency-based approach that seeks productive and functional literacy, this project espouses a democratic, knowledge-based critical literacy, one which gives citizens knowledge and resources to navigate their democracy with decision-making power.

Educate to regulate: In a scenario with an incipient media regulator and where market-driven politics have been naturalized and reinforced by mutually beneficial relationships between political and media elites, this project deemed important to embrace and explore Silverstone's (2007:180) idea of media literacy education as 'an alternative to the blunderbuss of media regulation'. The findings show that, as things stand now, regulatory matters cannot be put aside. IFETEL so far has been an organ with certain aptitude, albeit with acute shortcomings and questionable decisions. Given the lack of precedents of autonomous media regulation in Mexico, IFETEL has yet to reach a stage of institutional maturity. This makes the reliance on empirical evidence in policy-making particularly important, without setting normative ideas aside.

Trejo Quintana (2016) agrees that 'at least now, under current conditions, it couldn't be the alternative to regulation'; rather this project considers that media literacy could be an important input to strengthen institutional accountability. This is in line with Calleja's argument about the change in logic once people learn that what is on the media is part of their rights. In the Mexican context, Silverstone's (2007:185) slogan 'education, not regulation!' becomes 'education to improve regulation!'.

Formal and informal education: A recurrent benchmark for this research has been Europe and the US where media literacy, both as a subject of study and as part of curricula in schools, has been around since the late 80's. Still, this project has made an effort to mindfully assess the socioeconomic and institutional-political contrasts between these regions and Mexico, and what this can mean for media literacy. As it has been established, there are conditions and needs in Mexico to develop media literacy education policies in formal education. Nevertheless, there are three things to consider: 1) educators, policy makers and researchers –in collaboration– would have to determine the schools grades in which media literacy could be put into practice; this project, however, stands for a comprehensive application. Trejo Quintana (2016) considers Europe as an example to follow, where they have sought to incorporate media literacy in basic education 'it seems fantastic, and it's also a captive audience, you have assured access to a lot of kids'. She also thinks that 'we could make good use of it in secondary education and

higher education, because in all these stages there are many things to learn'; Orozco (2016), who wrote a manual 'aimed at teachers, parents and children', similarly subscribes to a wide-ranging application.

2) There is a need for educators, policy makers and researchers to be mindful of the diversity, needs and possibilities of the different regions when determining the general curricular approach of media literacy. Trejo Quintana (2016) alludes to the EU, where one can find countries with a stand-alone subject 'about media literacy in the curricula of basic education, and some countries where they have done it transversely, that is, doing different activities related to media and information literacy through all subjects'. This appreciation fits with two of the models identified by Masterman (in Potter, 2004:249): 'media studies as a specialist discipline in its own right' and 'media education across the curriculum'. Trejo Quintana considers the need for empirically-backed diagnoses of the various contexts in Mexico to know whether it is worthwhile to incorporate a single subject or do it transversely, rather than applying standardized policies. In this regard, she offers a sensible example: 'it's not the same to increase a subject in primary schools in Mexico City as in the mountains of Guerrero, Oaxaca or the rural schools in Veracruz'. This goes in line with this project's position about the need of a dynamic understanding and application of media literacy education.

3) Even though this project has visualized media literacy in formal education, the findings show that informal education cannot be left aside. Within a similar logic, IFETEL conferred private companies the license to broadcast media literacy campaigns. But more importantly, endeavours such Ávila's (2016) workshops with children, who has explored non-hierarchical methodologies through participative groups, and the computer literacy workshops for elderly people organized in the Media and Information Literacy forum, lead this project to envisage the benefits that critical pluralist media literacy could provide in both formal and informal education settings.

Not digital, but multi-media: The discussion throughout the research on the digital divide was not trivial: ever since the exponential growth and adoption of the internet and digital media, the field of media literacy has made an enthusiastic effort to 'keep up', leading to a host of publications dedicated to digital technology in education. One ensuing consequence is that, in some contexts, media literacy has virtually become a synonym for digital literacy (see Mihailidis, 2015; Hobbs, 2010). This project has claimed that there is a particular need in a setting such as Mexico to moderate the current enthusiasm for digital media on different levels: 1) for its opportunistic appropriation in political discourse; 2) for the ideologically-laden justification that regulation of ownership is no longer needed

(Freedman, 2015); 3) for its emphasis on functional and mechanical competences (Buckingham, 2007); and 4) because an emphasis on the digital would misrepresent the current media landscape, turning a blind eye to the existing divides and diversity in the population.

The idea is not to regress media literacy to pre-internet times (or as Buckingham (2007) puts it, abandon digital technology in favour of a return to 'basics'), but to recognize that the 'media' in media literacy has to stand for different kinds of media, and the emphasis of certain media over others will depend on the context. Potter (2004:250) reminds us that 'students have profoundly different motivations and agendas for their education'. For instance, Trejo Quintana (2016) is of the opinion that putting an emphasis on television 'in places where the media is the radio because there is no electricity but in the church and the town hall' is not likely to yield desired results. Additionally, as it has been settled, television is still the main medium through which the Mexican population is entertained, informed and assimilates a (dominant) representation of the world.

Pluralist: A good portion of the research has been devoted to understanding ownership as an ideological process and to the normative perspective of pluralism on ownership. As reviewed earlier, in media studies pluralism has an inexorably democratic spirit. If one of the main purposes of this model of media literacy is to enable people as full-time citizens with the capacity to improve the quality of their democracy, it follows that pluralism has to be an essential part of the model's normative architecture. In a media landscape with such acute levels of concentration and lack of content diversity, a pluralist approach to media literacy could offer people the elements to contest the hegemonic assumption that concentration is the 'natural' outcome of any media system, thus allowing citizens to have the widest possible range of views when participating in public life. Furthermore, a normative pluralist model would be valuable in allowing them to conceive 'democratic' ownership structures and regulatory practices, and to challenge structures and practices that are not (Freedman, 2014).

For instance, by demanding stronger, independent public service media with wider coverage, audiences could more likely find content that represents them in their diversity, and not feel marginalized for not having the 'correct' skin tone or consumer lifestyle: 'Because I am poor, because of my indigenous origin, because I am dark', are some of the answers given to Ávila (2016) by children when asked the reasons they cannot appear on TV.

Critical/agonistic: This project has argued that to fully understand and transform the media system in Mexico, it is necessary to examine it as the product of systems

of thought and practices that are in line with specific ways of ordering the world. Potter (2004) says that media necessarily have ideological and political implications. From this perspective, attitudes towards concentration, political-media affiliations, regulatory practices, dominant narratives in content such as the use of stereotypes or the exclusion of certain worldviews, to name a few examples, are revealing for their wider ideological positions.

A critical pluralist media literacy approach conceives the media as 'fields of contestation': it is founded on the notion of pluralism, and it seeks to contest the hegemonic ideological assumptions reproduced by media structures and representations. This derives from an agonistic model of democracy. This model is in conflict with the deliberate model which, as pointed out earlier, puts forwards ideas of social homogeneity incompatible with the diversity of social realities in Mexico, as well as the prevailing liberal democracy.

Earlier this research examined how public service media have not been granted licenses for financial independence based on certain ideological positions: when needed, the government can manage them as State-controlled media with propagandistic ends. For private media stakeholders, their commercial autonomy 'represents' disloyal competition, revealing a neoliberal position that presses public service media to have limited presence in the landscape in order to keep privatized structures in place.

From this perspective, to be able to address democratic challenges and the role of neoliberal principles in liberal democracies, a critical-pluralist approach to media literacy would have to avoid the kind of ideological 'middle grounds' often found in policies. Buckingham (2013:531) says media literacy policies in the UK have made an 'uneasy compromise between broadly social-democratic and neoliberal values' where the terms 'consumer' and 'citizen' are used interchangeably or combined (citizen-consumer), indeed reminding of us the way 'information society' and 'knowledge society' have been lumped together in policies in Mexico.

Orozco (2016) says that media education theory in Latin America used to have a marked political tradition infused with a Marxist ideology with aims to contest imperialist cultural values carried out through the media, but one that lacked a 'critical' component. He claims that, from UNESCO's perspective, the latter 'is what is being promoted, not from any one ideology, but from a fundamental agreement of human rights... this is not an ideology, but human rights'. But this project has made clear that media have ideological implications, and that something can be both critical *and* political. In the case of Mexico, it is necessary to address the media structures sheltered by a post-ideological worldview from

which liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism are seen as the only possible form of government. Furthermore, Buckingham (2007:149) reminds us that literacy is a phenomenon contained in social practices, determined by broader social and economic processes. For him, this means that literacy is inevitably a contested field, making any definition of literacy 'necessarily ideological, in that they imply particular norms of social behaviour and particular relationships of power'. For this reason, the meaning of media literacy is open to negotiation and debate. This emphasizes the need to point out what is meant by media literacy in order to define communication rights in the Mexican context.

From the analysis in this project, a critical pluralist approach to media literacy comes forward as a model able to integrate normative assumptions, empirical data and ideological critique into a vigorous assessment of the media system in Mexico, acknowledging the role of students and publics as citizens and encouraging a debate as an expression of their democratic rights.

Conclusions

This research has aimed to connect media literacy and citizen participation together. In this way, the aim of the research was not to develop a fully-fledged methodology of media literacy or a school curriculum, but to depict the normative frame of a prospective model that could pave the way to policy recommendations for media literacy, citizenship and democracy. As such, this research set out to answer the following questions that emerged from this juncture: What are the connections between media literacy and democracy? Why is media literacy absent in the Mexican media system? How can media literacy provide alternative strategies to critique and change the market ideology of the Mexican media and political landscape? How can media literate publics contribute to democratic affairs that involve the media, thus encouraging greater civic participation?

The research questions emphasized the emancipatory potential of media literacy, hence this research's affinity to critical media studies. If concentration of ownership is revealing for its wider ideological position, it follows that a pluralist approach to media literacy has to assume a diagnostic and contentious position facing systems of thoughts and practices that have helped fashion such concentration. The policy agenda of the telecom reform which incorporated long-standing public demands into the constitution served as the backdrop to the aims of the research. This project has examined how the reform has, to a point, ushered

the country into a new communicative scenario, not least for introducing a regulatory body with autonomous competences. However, the subsequent dilution of the reform towards legislation hinted at the reinstatement of the relationship between media and political leaders, propelled by pressure groups within congress that hold *de facto* relations with private media companies.

Rather than ushering in a new communicative scenario, the reform set in motion a transitional scenario identified in this research as a pivotal point typified by a democratic tug-of-war between the long-standing and dominant media structures and the new constitutional guidelines, which opened the door to democratic principles such as pluralism, diversity and the recognition of the rights of audiences, community and indigenous media – demands promoted by citizens for almost thirty years. In a robustly concentrated media landscape dominated by private media companies looking to defend their interests, resistance to change does not come as a surprise.

If the former scenario was shaped by the mutually beneficial relationship between media and political elites, then it follows that for a new scenario to ever spring from this parched soil the roots needs to come from ‘the society that is left in the middle’ (Padilla, 2016). In this way, this research has addressed this pivotal scenario by arguing that a crucial step to fulfil this transition requires publics who are literate in democratic affairs that involve the media. An important obstacle on this road is the ‘spectral quality’ of policymaking, an idea developed by Freedman (2015), which refers to the perception that policy processes require a level of expertise and resources that most citizens do not have. Owing to Freedman’s term, this research identified a form of ‘spectral participation’ in the policy environments in Mexico, an idea that implies institutionalized mechanisms of citizen participation in policy processes without performative capacities. As stated by two of the interviewees, Calleja and Guerrero, such practices take place in spaces where members of the public –including the advisory board of the regulator and civil advisors such as academics– have a symbolic presence, lacking any actual decision-making power.

In this way, the research has critically examined existing literature, policy documents and elite testimonies on the civic appeal of media literacy in this transitional scenario in Mexico. The argument is that, developed to its broad potential, media literacy can provide democratic benefits. There are normative and practical assumptions underlying this statement. Potter (2004), as we saw, believes that society at large will experience benefits if individuals are media literate. Trejo Quintana (2016), who has had a central role in articulating media literacy efforts at a pan-regional level, made clear that even trivial everyday

interactions with media technologies require a degree of literacy. In a democracy, the exercise of citizenship conflates the basic with the critical, and media literacy has the capacity to engage with the whole spectrum of interactions between the publics and the media.

In this sense, the project has made an attempt to engage with the analytical and normative questions regarding media and democracy, delineating the contours of the broader structures in which the media system is fixed. If promoters of media literacy in Mexico are concerned with democratic and civic matters, then it is important to consider the kind of media system that took root during the democratic transition and promote media literacy correspondingly. This project has argued that if the media are indeed part of the publics' rights, people should be able to exercise their citizenship by being involved in the decision-making of such affairs.

This is how we arrive to the core question of this thesis: how can media literacy enable publics to contribute in matters of media regulation and policymaking in Mexico? A critical pluralist approach to media literacy has a twofold civic component: first, it advocates that media are vital in a broader democratic context, and that what happens in and with the media is part of the rights of both younger and older citizens. Second, it must meet the challenge of offering skills, training and a range of actions in support of media and democracy. In line with what Trejo Delarbre (2016) said, a vital step to achieve this is to demystify misconceptions about these matters being too complex for the common person to understand. This can be done in formal and informal educational settings by deconstructing cryptic lexicon found in policy documents in a simple and transparent way, supported with practical examples that demonstrate how people can put into effect their rights through existing institutional mechanisms of participation, but also through extra-institutional activities that are not provided by the government.

As this research has shown, in the context of an arguably unfulfilled democratic transition the first constituent of this dual arrangement –education– has to necessarily engage with issues of a democratic nature, such as concentration and regulation of media ownership. This is why the model's core is underpinned by values that are fundamentally democratic: pluralism and diversity. If the long view is to inhibit processes of 'brutal concentration' in Mexico and the dominant ideology that sustain them, there is a need to envision education and regulation as components that articulate each other, functioning in a spiral process where education is seen to contribute to regulatory matters through public participation and, in turn, improved regulation asserts a sound institutional context for

education. In this sense, the policy and political landscape in Mexico serves as the basis to forge the kind of media literacy model promoted by this project.

Many of the critical approaches to media literacy refer to the relationship between the reader and the (mediated) text, and the need to tie in this relationship with larger socio-political issues of culture and power. This research has sought to expand on the understanding of the *critical* by inserting it into matters of media policymaking. This of course presupposes that such mechanisms exist. From this understanding, this project espouses that media critical literate publics understand that it is well within their rights to demand access points to participate in media policy processes.

In this sense, the second aspect in this composition takes education one step further towards concrete actions: demand access points in policymaking in order to discontinue the alienating spirit of 'spectral participation'. An active citizenship vigorously involved in media affairs could strengthen the regulatory body, IFETEL, which has a central role to play in the renovation of the telecom scenario. Even if critical pluralist media literacy emphasizes participation of publics in the policy process, holding the regulator accountable for its decisions is a form of low-intensity involvement that does not require full immersion in policymaking. By the way of public accountability and participation, the regulator could become more resilient when dealing with powerful private media conglomerates.

The long view is that, through media literacy education, the emerging generation of citizens can help rupture the progression of brutal concentration by demanding stronger regulation, robust and independent public service media and community media, and pluralism and diversity in ownership and content, and ultimately help turn a fledgling information society into a fledgling knowledge society. As such, the transitional media scenario has to be framed within the broader democratic scenario in Mexico.

In this way this research cannot and should not be conceived as an isolated contribution. As shown through the investigation, Mexico and Latin America are witnessing the initial stages of media literacy articulated as a wide-ranging, unified project, bringing together scholars and specialists who have had been advocating media education for decades in more isolated groups before the involvement of organizations like UNESCO and UNAOC. This project looks to supplement the arising movement of media literacy in these regions by offering a situated analysis that is sensitive to the media landscape in Mexico. One of the findings is that there is a lack of systematic research in this field that seeks to be filled through the Latin American and Caribbean Observatory of Media and Information Literacy.

Events like the AMILAC forum and the UNESCO's Chair of Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue are concrete expressions of cooperation at the international level that can be a source of support for local actors, in an exchange of lessons learned from successful examples in other contexts in order to strengthen the lobbying for media education at the local level.

The social reality in Mexico makes any reform to education particularly problematic, and the topic of education in Mexico in itself is of great complexity which cannot be exhausted within the scope of this research. However, this project has made an effort to show awareness of the current circumstances in order to envision the challenges that media literacy could face in spaces of formal education. So far, the restructuring of education brought about the constitutional reform is reduced to the administration of the unions and evaluation of the teachers, leaving matters of pedagogy and content on the side. Indeed, in a context such as this where the reform has focused on the control of educators and the educators themselves are concerned largely by the provision of basic literacy, it is understandable that media education barely registers as a concern. In this research, it has been argued that media education becomes a vital step to address the democratization of a media landscape severely concentrated in private hands, where the media have played a fundamental and controversial part in the political and public life of the country. As Domaille and Buckingham (2001) expressed in their report on the status of media literacy in different contexts at the international level, it is a source of optimism and strength that even in relatively difficult circumstances educators argue in favour of media education.

One of the challenges that this research has been sensitive to is the diversity of the educational needs in the different regions of the country. It is important to provide a more refined reading of the predominant 'Anglo-Saxon' models and consequently develop conceptual frameworks that are appropriate to these educational, political and cultural contexts. Following this path, this project can contribute to the pan-regional ambitions of UNESCO by providing an entryway into the Mexican scenario. As one of the diverging points from UNESCO's approach, this project established that being mindful of diversity is not trivial. However, there is no reason these approaches should be exclusive from each other. This research acknowledges that critical pluralist media literacy can profit not only from UNESCO as the driving force behind media literacy in Latin America, but also from the media literacy methodology they have developed. Indeed, this project would like to set forth a dialectic relationship in order to attain a comprehensive approach; to engage in a plural and critical dialogue. This project has a critical pluralist normative frame with the capacity to negotiate with, and

adjust to, UNESCO's methodology and curriculum for teachers. Achieving this goal is an enterprise for future projects. Nonetheless, it is important to start envisioning the next steps in the form of concrete actions that can help realize the considerable challenge of arriving to a truly new media scenario.

The media literacy model advocated by this project is situated in the polar opposite of the *spectral* model of participation. For this reason, the fundamental outcome of this approach occurs when citizens take action in the media landscape. However, it is necessary to visualize this result as part of a continuum. As things currently stand, formal recognition at government level –with SEP and IFETEL taking precedence– of the importance of media education as a key area for students is essential. To do so, advocates and scholars must find ways to communicate their ideas to politicians and decision makers in a clear and efficient way so they no longer perceive media education with suspicion or indifference. It is crucial to include an array of actors that are not only in academic or governmental environments; the support of advocacy groups and non-profit organizations such as AMEDI and Observacom is needed to start mobilizing media literacy policies for policy agendas. It is also important to coordinate existing media literacy efforts that are happening in Mexico, as exemplified by UNESCO and Irma Ávila. Naturally, the most interesting and productive efforts are happening beyond the reach of the formal education system by way of community and extramural projects. As such it is important to envisage a dialectical relationship between formal and informal media education. Another action is demanding that media literacy campaigns are not exclusively operated by private media, giving way to civic-sensitive public service campaigns. The constitutional telecom reform, even if partially, exemplifies that grassroots pressure can have tangible effects on policies. This same public thrust from below could ultimately lead, as it has been Guillermo Orozco's dream, to incorporate media literacy into curricular designs.

This project has made an effort to introduce an alternative understanding of democracy which is founded on contestation rather than consent. If the media are meant to seek and represent the plurality of citizens' experiences and points of view, it follows that democratic politics should create the conditions for the encounter to find its expression in dialectic terms, and channel the irreconcilable character of plural democratic debates in a positive way. One way, as seen, is encouraging participation of non-professional citizens in media decision-making. This is one reason why this project's model has an affinity with the values of agonistic democracy.

This project has shown that if practices of media ownership are preserved through systems of thought and action by favouring private and exclusionary ownership, then media literacy education should seek publics to think critically about these matters and act accordingly through structural participation. For instance, it was established that the official discourse about the regulated performance, funding and coverage of public service media is founded on administrative and technical grounds, but when the CIRT argues 'disloyal competition' by public service media on the one hand and objects about 'over-regulation' of private media on the other, they are revealing for their wider liberal market-oriented ideological position.

Indeed, within the long view critical pluralist media literacy seeks to unearth the current ideological underpinnings of the media system in Mexico in order challenge the naturalized notion that a media system rooted in liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism is the only conceivable arrangement. This approach is aligned to other perspectives of media education such as educommunication and MIL since, as seen throughout the project, 'literacy' represents an ideological definition is open to negotiation and debate. In line with values of agonistic democracy, arriving to an absolute and undisputed definition of media literacy is not desirable or even attainable. This is why this project has made an effort to be attentive to the diversity of needs and possibilities found throughout the different regions in Mexico when envisioning the application of media education policies. The discussion about the current emphasis on digital media in media literacy education hinges on this notion. A multi-media approach emerging from the contextual needs can engage with heterogeneous media cultures experienced one way or another in Mexico.

This thesis set out to explore the potential link between media literacy and democracy only to find that in Mexico these ideas come naturally together by dint of the fact that there is the promise of a new media scenario looming on the horizon, struggling to shed the systems of beliefs and practices that were forged during the transition from an authoritarian to democratic region. The final aspiration is to form a new generation of media literate citizens emerging from a knowledge society who can actively contribute defining the coming years, opening a new chapter in the democratization of media in Mexico. Indeed, media literacy has found fertile grounds to take root.

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Notes

¹ Mexico is a federal republic comprised by thirty-one sovereign states and a Federal District as the capital. Each state has its own local constitution, congress, and judiciary, and is ruled by governors elected for a six-year term. Nonetheless the local constitutions should be best understood as laws regulating matters reserved to the Federal Constitution, authority which they cannot exceed.

² Officially, the Constitution is the fundamental law in the country and the Secondary Laws derive from the constitutional articles. Carlos Padilla (2016) considers that Mexico is not governed by the Constitution, but by the laws that give shape to constitutional decrees. The steps towards legislation involve debates and negotiations by the different parliamentary groups in both chambers of the Congress. For instance, during this process pressure groups with ties to the media industry were able to partake in the shaping of the Federal Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting.

³ The National Chamber of Radio and Television Broadcasters, or CIRT, is an organization that institutionally represents radio and television broadcasters in Mexico. As the institutional agency through which the media industry enacts, the CIRT has had a central role in developing and safeguarding the interests of the private media sector. Within this frame their protests about censorship and over-regulation of media referenced in the thesis take place.

Appendix A

Elite interview respondents

Dr. Ivonne Velasco

Academic and journalist specialized in media and communication. Has worked as producer and host for public service media and is the former head of the Institute of Women in Morelos.

José Carlos Moreno

Founder of the activist news portal *Morelos 3.0*. Former Human Rights coordinator of the student movement *#YoSoy132*.

Carlos Padilla

Founder and collaborator of *Zócalo*, a specialized publication dedicated to media and political communication that assembles some of the most important media observers in the country.

Dr. Manuel Alejandro Guerrero

Media and policy researcher of Ibero-American University, policy advisor and member of the committee of the UNESCO chairs in Communications.

Aleida Calleja

Former member of the advisory board of the media regulator, coordinator of advocacy of Observacom (Latin American Observatory of Regulation, Media and Convergence), former president of AMEDI and current collaborator in matters of citizen participation and regulation.

Dr. Raúl Trejo Delarbre

Researcher and public intellectual, author of eighteen books on media and democracy and current president of AMEDI.

Irma Ávila

Social communicator who has received recognitions by UNESCO and UNICEF as a media educator of children and youth in Mexico. Founder of the festival for children *Apantallados*.

Dr. Janneth Trejo-Quintana

Media literacy researcher, policy advisor and coordinator of the first media literacy forum in Mexico.

Dr. Guillermo Orozco

Leading audience reception researcher in Mexico and Latin America for more than twenty years, director of the UNESCO chair on Media and Information Literacy in Mexico.

Dr. Carmen Gómez-Mont

Has served for twenty-five years as an academic specialized in the use of information and communication technologies in educational, social and cultural contexts with emphasis on indigenous communities, and as an educator of teachers in the adoption of media equipment in the classroom.

Appendix B

Main features of the Telecommunication and Broadcasting Reform (official information)

Public Services of General Interest

It is established in the Article 6º of the Constitution that telecommunications are public services of general interest, so that the State shall guarantee to provide them under conditions of competition, quality, plurality, universal coverage, interconnection, convergence, open access and continuity.

Audience Rights

The rights of audiences are considered, including among others, the right to access content that promote educational, cultural and civic learning, and the dissemination of impartial, objective and timely information.

New television broadcasters

In order to enable users to have a larger offering of content in broadcast television, two new television channels with national coverage were put out to tender.

Creation of the Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFETEL)

The Institute is created as an autonomous body whose powers are to implement and enforce fundamental rights under the Articles 2º, 3 º, 6 º and 7 º of the Constitution.

Prohibition of discrimination

In providing telecommunications services all discrimination based on ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disability, social status, or any other discrimination that violates human dignity is prohibited.

Establishment of the figure of the ombudsman for audiences

Dealers who provide service broadcasting must have an ombudsman who will be responsible for receiving and following up on comments, suggestions, or requests for people who make up the audience.

Multiprogramming in broadcast television

The viewer will have greater choice of content on broadcast television.

Net Neutrality

For Internet users, the law provides the main characteristics of the neutrality of the network to which companies that offer the service of internet are held to, such as: free choice, non-discrimination, privacy, transparency and information, quality.

Provision of telecommunications services to unconnected populations through the shared public network

The shared network can provide services and telecommunications infrastructure to promote universal service.

Appendix C

Interview guide - themes

Media and democracy

1. What effects can media concentration have on the health of a democracy?
2. In a media landscape of high concentration dominated by commercial actors, how can pluralism and diversity of content be guaranteed?
3. How would you define the relationship between the media and the political class?
4. How autonomous are regulatory spaces in the face of strong media corporations?

5. What kind of media environment is being promoted by the telecom reform?
6. Do you think IFETEL fully meets its autonomous role as a regulator of the media?
7. Do you consider that diversity and pluralism of media content is a natural consequence of the diversity of media ownership?
8. What can ask from television to serve as a public sphere for democratic deliberation?

Digital media

1. Can the digital space be conceived as an alternative to the conditions of strong concentration of traditional media?
2. Is the digital divide in Mexico a reflection of other gaps?
3. Is there a need to worry about oligopolies or lack of diversity of traditional media in a world of rapid digital developments?
4. Do you consider that the internet and digital media will have an impact in the short or medium term in the Mexican media model?

Citizen participation

1. Are the access points for citizens to participate in the public policy process?
2. How can citizens gain power in decision-making in the current climate?
3. Media public policies
4. Does media policymaking incorporate empirical, quantitative evidence?
5. Are there examples in which citizens were involved in the development of public policies in Mexico?
6. Media education and citizenship
7. Can media literacy contribute to democratization and pluralism of the media system?
8. Can we foster a culture of citizen participation through media education?
9. Have there been efforts to incorporate a subject of media literacy in the curricula of schools?

10. Is there any civic dimension or any explicit link to democratic issues in media literacy models promoted in Latin America?
11. Is there a fundamental difference between the 'information society' and 'knowledge society'?

Media literacy in Mexico

1. What were the goals of the Forum of Media Literacy and Information, and how it can be understood within the media context in Mexico?
2. Where does media literacy stand in Latin America and Mexico?
3. How much emphasis is given to digital media literacy?
4. What were the general experiences of the UNESCO chair of Media Literacy and Information and what comes next?
5. What contribution or what impact has media education had beyond academic circuits in Mexico?

Appendix D

Coding – examples of the matrixes

Media and Democracy				
Media and Political elites	Hegemonic media	Ownership: contrn/plsm	Regulator/Regulation	socioeconomic/political context
IV., no han sido maestros, nunca han estado frente a grupos, no tienen un desarrollo educativo ³² ...	IV. que por ejemplo hacer televisión en los medios comerciales es imposible por los costos ¹⁹	CP. ya no para la televisión abierta como actualmente se tiene todavía, y que con la reforma constitucional ya dejó de permitirse por televisión analógica ¹⁷	CP. también la posibilidad de que existiera un órgano regulador autónomo, ya existía un regulador de telecomunicaciones pero no era autónoma ⁵ .	IV que en México hay siete tipos de familia ³ .
no porque esté comprometido con la educación o porque entienda algo sobre esto ³³	JC. la teledictadura y la dictadura de todos estos medios hegemónicos. ⁷	CP. dos cadenas de televisión que se supone vendrían a competir con Televisa y TV Azteca ¹⁸ .	CP. un órgano para competencia económica también autónomo ⁶	IV. Con este modelo económico ⁹
IV. El congreso está tomado por la Telebankada, están interesados por sus intereses ⁴² .	MAG. cuando empieza el debate, televisa saca un desplegado público, y eso normalmente lo hace televisa ¹¹	CP. no hay una competencia en televisión, no hay nuevos contenidos ²¹	AC. comisionados y de cómo se procesarán las recomendaciones y las discusiones ⁴	la familia ya no pueden estar cerca porque todo mundo trabaja ¹⁰ .
El congreso está formado para representar la sociedad en general pero si la mayoría son iletrados. ⁴³	RTD. siendo el medio de entretenimiento o de información de la mayoría de los mexicanos ¹⁷	AC. no me parece que realmente exista esta apertura como algunos optimistas lo ponen ⁴⁸	AC. la relación del IFETEL con el consejo consultivo es casi nula ⁷	Entonces el niño está solo. ¹¹

Media Education				
Audiences	Media literacy	Private media	Objectives	Absence
GO. pero también en las redes sociales que tiene que ver con la privacidad ¹⁵	JTQ. Nos dimos a la tarea de contactar a los diferentes expertos que no solo están en... la academia ⁵	JTQ. pero claro, si en ley... dice eso, sobre que quienes deben hacer la alfabetización sean los privados, ahí si estamos fritos ⁴⁹	IA. sino ciudadanos con la capacidad de participar y dialogar con los adultos ²⁹	CP. el hecho de que por un lado se entregue a los niños tabletas, por el otro, los maestros no sepan usarlas entonces hay una deficiencia que hay que eliminar ⁴² .
GO. pero no solamente con la privacidad sino también por ser interlocutores ¹⁶	JTQ. y estos frentes son por ejemplo la iniciativa privada ⁶	JTQ. uno de los tres temas es la sobre-regulación ⁵¹ .	IA. es una metodología que parte de considerar a los niños sujetos y ciudadanos ³¹	AC. Es una batalla de hace mucho rato de varias organizaciones ⁴³ .
GO. tenemos derecho a que nos aborden no únicamente como consumidores, sino también como ciudadanos ¹⁹ ,	JTQ. TV UNAM, Ernesto Vázquez Briseño, impulsó la idea que México fuera el país que albergara el foro ⁹	JTQ. Y platicando con ellos te das cuenta que entienden la alfabetización en cierto sentido ⁵²	IA. Todo el rollo teórico no salió de la teoría sino de la práctica ³²	IA. Lo consideramos como se considera internacionalmente. El adulto-centrismo como esta forma de discriminación por edad. ⁴

Author biographies

Tina Askanius is a researcher and lecturer in the department of Communication and Media at Lund University, Sweden. She got her PhD in Media and Communication Studies in 2012 with a thesis on social movement media practices.

Alfonso Méndez Forssell holds a BA in Communication Sciences from La Salle University and an MSc in Media and Communication from Lund University. He wishes to contribute to the growing citizen movement in Mexico fighting for the rights of access to information and transparency through research and policymaking. He thoroughly believes that the key lies in media education in schools.

Lisa Jalakas holds a BA in Journalism from Gothenburg University and an MSc in Media and Communication from Lund University. In between her degrees and during her studies, she has worked as a news reporter for a newspaper and at Swedish public service radio. She currently works as a project manager and editor for a digital communication campaign.

Ally McCrow-Young holds a BA (Hons) in Film, Television and Media Studies from the University of Auckland, and an MSc in Media and Communication from Lund University. She is a co-founder of the Lund University Critical Animal Studies Network and is currently pursuing PhD positions in Sweden. She works as a freelance content writer and social media manager and lives in Malmö, Sweden.

Javie Ssozi is a graduate from Makerere University with a BA in Computer Science and from Lund University where he earned an MSc in Media and Communication Studies. Prior to pursuing his Master's degree, Javie supported a number of social media campaigns and provided media technical assistance to non-profit organisations in and outside Uganda. He is passionate about politics and the role of social media in contemporary political communication. He is currently based in Kampala, Uganda where he is working to set up a media and advocacy lab.

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In June 2016, the first community of students graduated from the MSc in Media and Communication Studies at Lund University, Sweden. This book showcases a selection of outstanding postgraduate dissertations with contributions from Alfonso Forssell, Lisa Jalakas, Ally McCrow-Young and Javie Ssozi. Their work provides excellent examples of original and creative theses on fascinating topics in the area of media and communication studies. The empirical areas covered range from media literacy in Mexico and the role of Twitter in political communication across different East African countries, to consumer activism and animal rights, and audience perspectives on feminist advertising.

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